

LEAF AND SERVICE SERIES

AMOS, PROPHECY OF A  
NEW ORDER

LINDSAY B. LONGACRE

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## LIFE AND SERVICE SERIES

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AMOS, PROPHET OF A NEW ORDER  
LINDSAY B. LONGACRE

**LIFE AND SERVICE SERIES**

Edited by HENRY H. MEYER

# Amos, Prophet of a New Order

BY  
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in the Iliff School of Theology



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## CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
LIFE AND SERVICE SERIES.....	7
TO THOSE WHO USE THESE LESSONS.....	9
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	10
I. THE PLACE OF PROPHETS IN HUMAN LIFE... ..	11
II. THE TIMES AND THE MAN.....	18
III. THE GOD OF NATIONS AND OF MEN.....	25
IV. THE CHOSEN PEOPLE.....	32
V. THE DECEITFULNESS OF RICHES.....	39
VI. THE PROPHET AND THE BUSINESS MAN.....	46
VII. TRUE WORSHIP.....	53
VIII. ARE NATIONAL DISASTERS DIVINE PUNISH- MENTS?.....	60
IX. PROPHETIC VISIONS.....	68
X. THE JUDGMENT—ACCORDING TO AMOS.....	76
XI. THE BLESSED FUTURE.....	84
XII. PROPHETS AND THE CHURCH.....	91
XIII. NOTES THAT INTERPRET AMOS.....	99





## LIFE AND SERVICE SERIES

A NUMBER of causes have combined to create a need for special elective courses for adults. Perhaps chief among these causes is the rapid increase in the adult membership of our Sunday schools during the past fifteen years. The organized class movement has been influential in bringing into the Sunday school many thousands of men and women, so that now it is not uncommon to find schools in which the adults represent decidedly more than one half the total attendance.

With increase of numbers has come a desire for variety in the courses of study offered. With one or two small classes, meeting usually as part of an assembly including the entire membership of the school, there was little demand for any other than the Uniform Lesson. As the adult classes increased in number and size the conviction grew that different types of classes required different kinds of study courses.

The sentiment in behalf of a variety of study courses has been strengthened by the growing recognition of the principle of grading. This principle has won almost universal recognition as applied to the elementary and secondary groups in the church school. But why should grading cease automatically with the close of adolescence? Are we to believe that adult life is lived upon a dead level? We all know that this is not true, and, accordingly, the general acceptance of graded courses for the children's and young people's departments has tended to strengthen the conviction that something akin to graded courses should be provided for adult classes.

Again, there has been a growing recognition of the importance of the elective principle. Why may not adult men and women, who may be presumed to know something about what they need as well as what they want, be permitted to choose their study courses instead of having only one course urged upon all who look to the Church School to

meet, in part at least, their needs for the discussion and study of the problems of religion and for the stimulation and development of their religious lives? It is clear that the desire of thoughtful men and women to choose what they shall study is steadily growing.

The Life and Service Series, in common with a number of other series of studies, is offered in response to the need for special elective study courses. It includes a number of textbooks, each consisting of thirteen lessons, that is, studies for a period of three months for groups meeting once each week. Both in subject-matter and in form of treatment of the respective subjects these courses, it is believed, will be found to offer a desirable and pleasing variety.

Some of them will be found especially adapted to the needs of voluntary study groups in colleges and preparatory schools, and others for high-school credit in Sunday and in week-day religious instruction.

In Amos, Prophet of a New Order, the author has provided a strong, vital study in popular form of the personality and message of the prophet Amos. In style the book will be found to be as vigorous and interest-compelling as it is morally significant and vital in content. It should prove a most valuable study for a large number of adult classes.

THE EDITORS.

## TO THOSE WHO USE THESE LESSONS

THE study of the little tract commonly known as the book of Amos is of value chiefly as it leads to some acquaintance with the prophet himself, in order that through him one may get a glimpse of the way God speaks to men. Accepting the fact that God spoke through Amos, we are concerned with the subjects on which he spoke and with the questions (1) How far do the same or similar subjects concern us to-day? and (2) How far do his words apply to present-day conditions?

In pursuance of this purpose the little book of Amos has not been followed mechanically from the first verse to the last, but the various sayings that deal with the same subject are brought together in the successive lessons. This permits a more orderly treatment of the teachings of this great prophet—a prophet much greater than the small size of his book would lead one to expect.

The first step in the study of the lessons is to read from the Bible the words of Amos himself. Only after the text has been read with care can this book be used with profit.

LINDSAY B. LONGACRE.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

THE following books are both useful and interesting. The first two are small commentaries. The others are more general and more practical in their treatment. A teacher should have at hand at least the volume of "The Cambridge Bible."

"The Cambridge Bible": *Joel and Amos.*

"The New Century Bible": *The Minor Prophets, Volume I.*

"The Expositor's Bible": *Book of the Twelve Prophets, Volume I.*

"Messages of the Bible": *The Earlier Prophets.*

*The Message of the Earlier Prophets to Israel, Brooke.*

*The Prophets of Israel, Cornill.*

*History of the People of Israel, Cornill.*

*The Syrian Christ, Rihbany.*

## CHAPTER I

### THE PLACE OF PROPHETS IN HUMAN LIFE

“WHAT went ye out to see? a prophet?” Thus Jesus challenged the bystanders regarding John the Baptist.

Long before the days of Jesus and of John, another prophet had appeared whose message was as unexpected and as vigorous as that of the Baptist, and whose appearance was almost, if not quite, as uncouth.

The men of culture and fashion, of wealth and power, who lived in that prophet's days have perished unhonored and unsung, while this stern, uncompromising preacher of a new righteousness still shines as a light in the world. We know this forerunner of Jesus and of John by the name of Amos. Let us go out to see him!

There will be nothing about his appearance particularly attractive. When he visits Bethel, where the king lives, his dress, manner, and speech will show him to be from the country. If he is to make himself heard, he must have something to say, and he must say it with power. But when his eye catches yours, you have no doubt about his ability or his courage. Here is one (you feel) in whom the word of God is “like a hammer that shatters the rock.”

What was such a man doing there?—this “prophet,” as he is called. What is a prophet, and what does he do?

Volumes have been written on this subject, and any good Bible dictionary has articles on “Prophet” and on “Prophecy” which are well worth consulting. A plausible statement to start with, however, would be as follows: When a man of unusual devotion to God and his fellow men, with special understanding of God's will and man's duty, is so stirred in his soul that he cannot keep still about it but must proclaim the truth that is in him, exhorting the people to see it his way and to do as he says; and when subsequent history shows this man to have been right,

whether his own people believed him or not, that man is called a prophet.

The important points in this statement are (1) the prophet's own conviction that he has a true vision of the will of God; (2) his concern for his own people; and (3) the truth of his message recognized in after times. As a matter of fact the prophets do not usually live long enough to verify this third point; and as the majority of their own people usually misunderstand them or actually oppose them, the prophet must get what satisfaction he can from his own inner consciousness and from the friendship of the few who sympathize and coöperate with him.

### THEY WERE REAL PEOPLE

The prophets of the type of Amos form a small but glorious company. To say that they deserve to be understood is to put it mildly. No richer task awaits any Bible student than a prolonged and profound fellowship with any one of them; and though that task is difficult, even a partial success is worth the effort.

It is not easy at first to think of prophets (especially the Biblical prophets) as real men. The fact that they are "in the Bible" seems to remove them from the common life. They seem to stand apart not only from us to-day but even from the men of their own time. Yet one of the first necessities is to recognize them as truly human, cheered by human joys and saddened by human sorrows. Indeed, they were *men* before they were *prophets*; and they must be known as men, so far as that is possible, before their prophetic work and character can be appreciated.

Little as we know about Amos, for instance, his rural life alone throws a flood of light on the naturalness of the way he looked at the luxury of the city. For him "the simple life" was the normal and familiar life; and one can read between the lines of such a passage as Amos 6. 1-6 the outraged feelings of a man to whom all this luxury was useless and citified as well as heartless and wicked.

### GREAT BUT LONESOME

The fact that Amos was thus natural and human does

not mean that he was any less religious or that he was not in every respect exactly like an "ordinary man." All "great" men are different from "ordinary" men, yet are not less human on that account. Abraham Lincoln and Henry Ward Beecher were extraordinary yet quite natural and human. Their kinship with average mortals only made their true greatness the more noticeable.

The same kind of thing is true of the prophets, Amos included. In their particular field they stood far above their fellows; in matters of the common life they stood at their side. "Stand up," said Peter to Cornelius, "I myself also am a man" (Acts 10. 26); and it was the same with the prophets.

Great as these men were, one cannot help feeling sorry for them; for they must have been terribly lonesome. There were but few of them all told; and when we remember that these few were distributed over a thousand years, it is quite clear that they could not hope to be known and heard by "a jury of their peers." Of course they must have had some friends. If it had not been for these, the prophets' words would not have been heeded and preserved. In addition to the books of the prophets, such books as Deuteronomy and Kings show that the great mass of the people paid little, if any, attention to the great prophets. The only reason why the prophetic warnings and rebukes were repeated over and over again to the same generation and by successive prophets to successive generations is that they were scorned or ignored by the people to whom they were addressed in the first place.

It was a comparatively small group that gathered about any individual prophet; and it is to some of these friendly listeners that we are probably indebted for the reports of the prophetic words. The situation was entirely similar to that of Jesus himself. Even he gathered only a small group of followers in his own day, and it is from these that there have come down to us the words of the Master, heard and treasured by the friendly few.

One more point regarding the prophets is of great importance. Indeed, it is of much more importance to us than it could have been to any one of themselves. It is

this: The Bible nowhere indicates that the line of prophets has been exhausted or completed.

While it is true that the Bible prophets are better known than any others, that is chiefly because the Bible itself is so familiar. Such passages as Num. 11. 29; Joel 2. 28, 29 (Acts 2. 17, 18); Eph. 4. 11 plainly indicate that the possession of the prophetic spirit was regarded as the ideal for all men. And when Paul speaks of his converts as "built upon the foundation of the apostles *and prophets*" (Eph. 2. 20) he is referring not to the past but to the present—to the apostles and prophets of his own day.

This fact opens up a wholly new view of prophets and of prophecy. The common idea that true prophets are to be found only in the Bible and that these were a curious kind of folk, unlike any others then or since, is neither stated nor implied anywhere in the Bible. Furthermore, the church has never taken any such position; it has exalted and revered the prophets of the Bible, as was right and proper to do, but the church has never said that the voice of prophecy was silenced when the last word of the Bible had been written down. The church stands today upon a foundation of apostles and prophets which, reaching far back into the past, includes men and women of the living present.

#### Spokesmen for God

Consider the place the prophet fills in the life of the world. He is a man who, by virtue of gifts and insight quite out of the ordinary, has become the very voice of God to his generation. Not, indeed, that he is at that time recognized as such; but later generations so recognize him. He is above all else God's spokesman. Not prediction but proclamation is his main work. He is a *forthteller* rather than a *foreteller*. He views the life of his day in the light of his vision of God. He turns that light upon men's morals and motives, upon the way they think and act toward each other, and he sees in these relations between man and man the special field in which man works out his religion and the place, above all others, where God is really present.



He is not so much concerned with individuals as with the social life in which individuals find their common interests and their common welfare. He thus becomes, above all else, a critic of social conditions. This is, of course, not the prophet's only interest, but it is his chief one and it colors all his thought.

### THEY SPOKE AT THEIR PERIL

The prophet, then, is a man so convinced that God is one who desires a clean, wholesome social order here on earth that he stands right up and says so. He always sees a higher level than men have yet attained. He sees a nobler ideal than they have yet realized. And in pointing out the path leading to it he necessarily points out where men have gotten off the track. He must show the error and the weakness of the present position before anyone can be brought to see the need of something better.

For this reason he is unwelcome to most of his fellow countrymen. People do not love a "knocker." Social changes have always been looked upon by most people as unnecessary if not downright dangerous. Institutions and corporations, built up on the supposition that conditions will remain unchanged, are always up in arms against any proposed readjustment even if it should be for the better. They are sure it would not be better *for them* and so they are against it.

This means that a prophet is a kind of pioneer—a pathfinder through a dense growth of selfish interests and blind indifference. If he undertakes to blaze a trail through this territory, he must risk all the dangers of such a task. Thorns of malice will scratch him, rocky cliffs of ignorance will block his path, snakes of slander will bite him, the wild beasts of pride and jealousy will attack him. He takes his life in his hand. But he has heard the call of the "trumpet that shall never sound retreat" and he, with God, marches on.

### HOW ARE PROPHETS TO BE RECOGNIZED?

Suppose such a man were among us to-day: how could he be recognized? The answer is easy (and true) that he

may be recognized now in the same way that Amos was recognized in his day. This, unfortunately, does not carry us very far, for there is no doubt that only a minority of Amos' contemporaries regarded him as a true prophet of the living God. Many more regarded him as a questionable and dangerous character, and some never knew him at all. There is something pathetic in the thought that many in Israel lived and died without knowing that an Amos had been among them.

The few who realized that in Amos a great leader had arisen were men who, on their own account, had already become aware that things were not as they should be; that business, politics, religion, society at large, all came far short of the glory of God and the welfare of men. They realized that "new occasions teach new duties," and that the time was ripe for just such changes as Amos demanded. In this spirit they were ready to recognize and to welcome one who stirred their souls and voiced their hopes.

Prophets have never been recognized by curiosity seekers but only by those prepared to coöperate with them. "Deep calleth unto deep." If there is a prophet at hand to-day—and there is no reason why there should not be—we can be pretty sure that he will show the marks that prophets have shown through all past history: (1) He will speak with unfaltering conviction, courage, and candor. (2) He will show utter disregard for personal advantage of power, publicity, or success. (3) He will definitely challenge the social order. (4) For this challenge he will be denounced and opposed by representatives of commercial, political, and religious institutions. (5) He will leave in the minds of some the seed of such novel, vital principles that these will take root and grow, and after ages will point back to him as a great pioneer in the life of the spirit. (6) He will pay the price of spiritual greatness in being misunderstood, opposed, neglected, and apparently defeated.

Only a man of supreme courage and unfaltering faith is sufficient for these things. God's word is a fire (Jer. 20. 9; 23. 29) and it will be uttered. It is being uttered to-day, and those who seek it find it. But let those who seek it

remember that the signs by which God's word may be known must be learned from the story of those who have dared to speak it.

The question for us is not so much, How can a prophet be recognized? as it is, Are we ready to follow him when he appears? That readiness is the secret of recognition. Happy were those whom Amos could call his friends; and who were neither afraid nor ashamed to be known as such!

#### QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

Do we need prophets to-day?

If there were prophets to-day what would they talk about?

Where might they be expected to appear?

#### FOR FURTHER READING

"Prophets" as described in some Bible dictionary or encyclopedia.

The difficulty of recognizing prophets, even in Bible times: Deut. 13. 1-5; 18. 9-22; Jer. 23. 9-40.

"The Prophet in Early Israel," in the volume of "The Expositor's Bible" recommended in the Bibliography.

## CHAPTER II

### THE TIMES AND THE MAN

THE keynote of national feeling in the time of Amos was security. It was a time of social, financial, and political prosperity. This does not mean that everybody was happy. Our own country, in its highest tides of so-called prosperity, has never lacked great masses of people who were compelled to live in tragic poverty, submerged by a flood of social injustice above which they were utterly unable to rise. Prosperity meant, then as now, the security and success of those who held political power or financial advantage. Amos saw this aspect of life so clearly and denounced it so unsparingly that one is surprised at the completeness of the picture revealed by his sharp flashes of prophetic fire.

He saw (1) wealth and luxury everywhere: the idle rich (3. 12; 6. 1), with their ivory furniture and silk upholstery (3. 12; 6. 4), their town and country houses (3. 15), their table delicacies (6. 4), and their cosmetics (6. 6). He heard the music that unfailingly accompanied private feast and public worship (5. 23; 6. 5; 8. 3, 10). He saw the degradation of the liquor traffic (4. 1; 6. 6).

He saw (2) the wretchedness of the poor: exploited by "gentlemen's agreements" (3. 10), robbed of justice through bribery (5. 12), cheated with light weights (8. 5), starved with adulterated foods (8. 6), and sacrificed to "big business" (2. 6).

He saw (3) a religion ceremonially elaborate but entirely lacking in ethical content (5. 21-24): the Sabbath irksome when it interfered with business (8. 5), illegal gains insidiously used for religious purposes (2. 8), the vanity of published subscription lists (4. 5), and the subserviency of the clergy to men in high position (7. 12, 13).

It is easy for the rich and happy to believe that they have divine approval. What better assurance could they

have than the pleasure and power in which they stand? In these secure ones the nation felt itself not only prosperous but divinely favored. Since they are conscious of representing the country, interference with them and their pursuits would be interfering with the country's welfare. To disturb *their* order is to disturb the social order. To criticize *their* religion is to prove oneself a heretic and a blasphemer. God is on the side of those in power (they think), and so to the security of financial and political position the leading people of Amos' day added the comforting conviction that they were Jehovah's chosen people—chosen to be thus superior and secure.

#### A NEW THOUGHT OF GOD

Amos thought differently. He saw the prosperity, but he saw more than that. He saw Jehovah's choice at work, but it was not a choosing that approved such conditions. So Amos drew his own picture of this security, denied that Jehovah's favor was a blind partisanship, and criticized king, priest, and people (that is, the "representative" people) on moral and ethical grounds—grounds that for Amos were religious. We can appreciate the daring of such a criticism and the courage of such a critic, but we can hardly appreciate the novelty of either.

It is not without a certain awe that one finds himself face to face, for the first time in history, with the conception that God's character is a character of principle rather than of partisanship; and that he is actuated by motives of justice rather than of arbitrary indulgence. An idea that has become a commonplace of religious thought must have had an origin somewhere; and *so far as our Scriptures are concerned, this is the time and the place where this great principle was first definitely announced.* Elijah had moved in this direction when he rebuked the social injustice of Ahab (1 Kings 21), but Amos was the first to set forth ethical righteousness as central and determinative in the divine character.

#### RELIGION REFLECTS SOCIAL LIFE

It may at first seem strange that such a vital revelation

concerning the character of God should be so closely related to the kind of life that Amos saw about him. Yet this connection between history and religion may be illustrated at almost any stage of the nation's progress. For instance, when the Hebrews entered Canaan, the land was not only populated but had its cultivated fields, its vineyards and olive trees, its villages and towns, and its walled cities and great buildings. It thus formed a striking contrast to the wilderness in which for years the Hebrews had been living. The whole scheme of life was more elaborate and called into play a variety of occupations and interests that in the desert would be quite unknown.

The contrast is plainly indicated in two familiar phrases descriptive of the Promised Land. One phrase starts from the desert life, where flocks and herds supplied the chief subsistence, and where honey stored in the rocks by wild bees was a delicacy. In terms of this desert welfare the Promised Land was referred to as "flowing with milk and honey." The other phrase starts from the life in Canaan itself, with its vineyards and harvests; and in the words "a land of corn and wine" one sees a picture of the land painted, so to speak, by its own hand.

The new life exerted a deep influence upon Hebrew thought. The simple life of the desert had been associated with a simple form of religion. Jehovah was thought of largely as the Defender of tribal interests, as Leader in war, as Master of the furious desert storms, and as the God of the glowing stars. In Canaan the people of the land felt their gods to be active in still wider fields. The populated land had many shrines and sacred places where the gods were sought. The fields needed sunshine and showers (not the fierce storms of the desert but refreshing rains), and the gods of Canaan were believed to send these. Above all, the wonderful process of fertility itself, in which the seed bears "thirtyfold, sixtyfold, and a hundredfold," was a field in which the power and activity of the gods were especially seen.

When one considers that in modern times all these fields and forces are recognized without question as falling within the proper scope of one divine Providence, it is not sur-

prising that the Hebrews, in the years following their entrance into Canaan, felt more and more that they would have to pay some attention to the religion of the land if they themselves were to live there with any security. Out of this situation sprang some of the most difficult religious problems with which Amos had to deal. Yet it was due in part to such influences as these that the Hebrews began to move out toward larger conceptions of God than either the desert or Canaan could satisfy or supply. It was not a rapid progress. They traveled by devious ways and they fell into many errors; but from time to time great leaders arose who were able "to reprove, rebuke, exhort," and who succeeded in turning the thoughts of earnest souls toward larger and truer conceptions of God.

#### THE GREAT KING JEROBOAM II

These leaders were the prophets, among whom Amos stands out in bold outlines. He appeared in the reign of Jeroboam II, king of Israel. The brief account of this long reign (2 Kings 14. 23-29) includes enough to show that Jeroboam must have been a great king—a fact confirmed by the picture of the kingdom given in the book of Amos. This is indicated by such statements as 2 Kings 14. 25: "He restored the coast of Israel from the entering of Hamath unto the sea of the plain [literally, Arabah]"; and verse 28: "He recovered Damascus, and Hamath." In looking up these places on the map note that they indicate the widest expansion of the northern kingdom, comparable even to the successes of David himself. Such triumphs are all the more impressive in the case of Jeroboam because they are reported by one who evidently could not regard this king with entire approval (verse 24).

Toward the close of Jeroboam's reign a serious danger appeared on the nation's horizon in the shape of the great empire of Assyria. If this great nation should start out on a campaign of conquest, Israel would be as helpless before her as Belgium was before Germany at the beginning of the Great War. The Hebrews knew this. Amos knew it. But Amos not only saw it as a possibility, he felt it as a practical certainty and looked forward to it with

horror. He saw no way of escape for his people. They would be captured and slaughtered by Assyria, as a helpless lamb might be caught and devoured by a wild beast (Amos 3. 12).

This conviction on the part of Amos undoubtedly had its influence upon his message and will account in part for its sternness and vigor. This is another illustration of the way history and revelation work together. It is not enough to say that the message of Amos was divinely inspired. This is quite true, but it hardly pictures the practical side of the truth. It should also be said that the message of Amos was inspired by what he saw in the life of his people and by what he recognized as a national danger. Amos went even beyond this: he not only saw the danger but regarded it as having a divine meaning. He interpreted it as growing out of God's purpose of punishment (Amos 2. 14-16; 3. 13-15; 5. 27; 6. 14).

#### WAS AMOS A PACIFIST?

This attitude that Amos takes toward a foreign foe deserves a moment's attention. The nation of Israel, even in its days of greatest expansion, was a comparatively small affair. It was only one of a group of little states that lay between the Arabian desert and the Mediterranean Sea. Each little state had its own ambitions, political policies, religions, wars. No one of them could ever have any assurance of an enduring peace, for it could never know when one of the neighboring states, or a group of them, would start out on the warpath. So that Israel, along with her neighbors, lived almost constantly on the defensive and was engaged in frequent wars.

In view of this situation any religious leader would necessarily have something to say or do about Israel's foes; and it is in this connection that Amos shows what a remarkable change had come over the spirit of Israel's religion during the two hundred or more years that Israel had been a nation. In the early days, when Samuel, Saul, and David were welding the little state into shape, the Hebrews were in almost continual conflict with their western neighbors, the Philistines. There were prophets in



those days as well as in the days of Jeroboam II. And those early prophets had very definite ideas about the meaning of the Philistine invasion. With no uncertain voice they stirred up their fellow countrymen to repel the invader. The historical portions of 1 Samuel show clearly that there was no doubt in that day that the advance of an enemy called for no reaction but resistance. There is no evidence of any idea that the religious and social conditions among the Hebrews had anything to do with a foreign invasion.

In the days of Amos the prophets thought differently. When they saw invasion threatening their little state they understood it as a call not to resistance but to repentance. "This threat of annihilation at the hand of Assyria," said Amos in effect, "is Jehovah's warning to you to renovate the whole social fabric: reform your religion, your politics, your business and your social life." In the early days the Spirit of Jehovah was understood as calling men to arm for battle; but Amos understands the same Spirit to call rather for purification of the national life. It was a long step from the picture of a Saul in 1 Sam. 11. 6, 7 to the picture of an Amos in Amos 3. 9-12. But the contrast between the two shows clearly the direction of that path of righteousness along which Jehovah was leading his people.

It has just been said that it was a long step from Saul to Amos. It was a long step, but not the last one. It would be most inadequate to-day to suppose that warfare alone indicated the wickedness of either side. Questions about both parties to the conflict must be asked and answered if there is to be fair treatment for both. But such questions are unsuspected until raised by a growing appreciation of the will and character of God. Prophets and teachers who came after Amos led men to still wider views of men and nations. Other principles, building on those announced by Amos but reaching even further than his, were yet to be proclaimed.

The book of Amos clearly shows that his point of view was not widely accepted by those who heard the prophet propose it. But Amos said it, and it took root. The root has grown slowly and uninvitingly, "like a root out of a

dry ground," and but few men desire it even yet. The days may be long and many before its proper fruit blesses the world. Who has wisdom and courage sufficient to cultivate this fruit?

#### QUESTIONS TO DISCUSS

If Amos had been brought up in the city instead of the country, would he have seen the luxury, the poverty, and the religious ceremonies as clearly as he did?

To what extent do ease and comfort, peace and quietness, indicate God's favor?

Has the modern recognition of the social side of Christianity been due, to any extent, to the development of modern social life? Consider here the influence of popular education, of world-wide trade, and the information made possible by telegraph and the daily press.

Why does Amos seem unimpressed by the real greatness of Jeroboam and his reign?

Under what circumstances does patriotism cease to be true religion?

Is there any difference between a 100 per cent American and a 100 per cent Christian?

To what extent is a preacher's popularity a proof of the truth of his message?

## CHAPTER III

### THE GOD OF NATIONS AND OF MEN

Amos 1. 3 to 2. 5<sup>1</sup>

#### DOES GOD LOVE AN ENEMY NATION?

FROM the days of George Washington to the present time the question has not been settled whether the United States should have any part at all in European affairs. Relations between nations are a subject that has never yet been placed upon an enduring basis. Nations are naturally suspicious of each other. Our beliefs in God as the God of the whole earth and in the idea that normally men should live at peace with each other have had only slight influence in determining our foreign policies. In view of this obvious fact it need cause no surprise that in the days of Amos the common relation between nations was one of enmity.

This feeling was supported by the (to us) curious notion that there was no one deity who had equal control of all

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<sup>1</sup>The contents of this interesting passage are no more remarkable than the form in which they are expressed. The references to the successive nations are taken up in well-marked paragraphs, or stanzas, each one of which opens and closes with a kind of refrain. It is evident that these "refrains" are poetical in their character and are not to be taken literally. The opening words "For three . . . for four" simply indicate that the measure of iniquity is full, and that punishment can no longer be delayed. As a matter of fact, only one transgression is specified in each case. (See a similar use of numbers in Prov. 30. 15, 18, 21, 29.) Similarly the words "I will send a fire . . . and it shall devour" are not intended to indicate a destructive catastrophe of any kind.

This is the kind of passage in which the familiar division of the Bible into verses is particularly misleading. Verses were devised originally as a scheme by which any part of the Bible could be conveniently referred to; and this is their proper use. They were not intended to offer texts complete in themselves, nor to indicate a Biblical outline, nor to destroy the continuity of a passage (as in this case). Above all it should be remembered that they did not appear in the original Hebrew manuscripts.

nations. Any particular deity was supposed to be the deity of a particular people. This deity was worshiped by his own people and by them only. His power was not supposed to extend beyond the bounds of his own nation. This belief was held by the rank and file of the Hebrews, not only in the days of Amos but long afterward as well. Originally the term "God of Israel" was meant literally, locally, and exclusively. Only a few of the more enlightened leaders seem to have had any other idea (see, for example, 1 Sam. 26. 19; 1 Kings 11. 33; 2 Kings 17. 27-33).

Amos was one of the few, and probably one of the first, to think of Jehovah as having any real part in the affairs of other nations. Such an idea would appear wholly new and strange to his fellow countrymen; and the passage before us, when Amos uttered it, must have been listened to with great surprise. For here Amos is calling a roll of nations with whom (it was commonly believed) Jehovah had nothing to do; yet Amos is saying that Jehovah would call these other nations to account.

Amos does not stop with the simple assertion of Jehovah's foreign control; he is convinced that Jehovah is concerned with the behavior of these nations toward each other. They are not there simply as pawns in a huge game, to be swept off the board at the will of the player; they have their own aims and accountabilities, and Amos, with true prophetic daring, asserts that their accountability is to Jehovah. Note that the nations referred to make up practically the whole of the political world in which Amos lived; and that he is really claiming Jehovah as *the God of his world*, and not only of his nation. From this standpoint he sees that Jehovah's interest and concern extend to the relations which these nations hold toward each other.

Does all this seem foreign and distant—a matter of ancient history and a dead past? If so, consider the religious and patriotic ideas that found expression among us during the great war. As a matter of theory, of "faith," the Christian nations that fought so bitterly believed in God as the God of the whole earth. Yet each one of them

prayed to God as if he were the God of that nation alone. God was appealed to as a particular and partisan Deity—powerful enough, it is true, to vanquish his foes, but interested chiefly, if not exclusively, in the particular nation concerned.

Was there not a conspicuous rarity of prayers indicating that God was believed to have a concern for the relations of these nations with each other? He was appealed to for victory, but not for help to refrain from mistreatment of the enemy. We all rested stupidly down on the old level of winning the victory, blind to the fact that the way nations behave toward each other is, in the sight of God, of more consequence than the supremacy of our own or any other nation.

This line of thought leads still further. The discussion of the League of Nations raised many questions about the rights and relations of nations among themselves. At times it has seemed that a true internationalism was almost within reach. "Internationalism" is, of course, too modern a word to apply to the position which Amos takes, but he was actually taking the first step along the path that leads to it; for no real internationalism can be built upon a basis that omits the larger dictates of human equity or attempts to build itself solely on the basis of power and selfish advantage. Faith in the God of Amos means faith in a God of the world as a whole, and not faith in a partisan or selfish God. Such a faith sees *all* nations as members of a world family. Only in such a faith can a true internationalism be established.

It is even easier for nations than for individuals to become self-centered, to seek political power and commercial advantage under the banner of a patriotism that exalts nationality at the expense of humanity. There is a false patriotism that has too often been either a cloak or an excuse for plans and practices that, in their narrowness and selfishness, are even more foreign to the spirit of Christ than they would have been to the spirit of Amos. It is against this sort of thing that the words of Amos are really directed; as it is toward an ideal internationalism that they really open the way.

## DOES WARFARE EXCUSE BRUTALITY?

Amos teaches that Jehovah is God of the nations not only in a political sense but also in a sense that reaches deeper than politics because it concerns men as human beings. The acts here condemned include: brutal torture of the vanquished (1. 3); town populations carried captive wholesale (1. 6, 9); disregard of treaty obligations (1. 9); implacable hatred (1. 11); atrocious treatment of women (1. 13); desecration of graves (2. 1). In view of the reports that are not yet forgotten which came to us from the battlefields of Europe, these atrocities have a strangely familiar sound. And, despite our horror at them, they were done only yesterday, and by "Christian" nations! If Amos denounced such things nearly three thousand years ago, when brutalities were taken for granted as necessary evils, what terms would he have found adequate for the twentieth century of the Christian era? Our lesson is a testimony to a barbarity that has not yet disappeared, as well as to a humanity that showed itself as long ago as in the days of this ancient prophet. Indeed, from one point of view a large part of mankind's career has been a struggle between these two impulses.

A certain measure of excuse may be found for the people to whom Amos was speaking. They recognized in such acts the natural accompaniments of warfare. The Oriental is proverbially cruel as a conqueror, and probably no one ever supposed that such acts were not to be taken as a matter of course. The Old Testament indicates clearly the readiness of both people and rulers to follow these methods (see Judges 1. 6; 8. 16; 1 Sam. 15. 3); and they believed that they had divine approval. But here a new note is struck and a new ideal proposed in the matter of human relations.

Before any general sentiment against cruelty can be developed, glaring instances must be recognized and denounced. Before "man's inhumanity to man" can be brought under the control of high principle in this regard, men must be shocked into attention by a sudden realization of the enormity of extreme cases. Amos had been thus

awakened and shocked; and in horror of what he saw he felt himself called to be the spokesman of a new order wherein interests of politics and power would have to give way before the interests of men as men.

This idea was so new that even Amos himself had not wholly adjusted himself to it, and he was not strictly logical in its application. He seems not to have noticed that the punishments with which he threatens these different offenders would involve the very acts which he condemns. He ignores the fact that the captivity with which, for instance, he threatens Syria (1. 5) or the extermination with which he threatens the Philistines (1. 8) could not in that day have been carried out without the cruelties inseparable from ancient warfare. It is a question whether Amos was in a position to think of any other way to punish a nation than by defeat in war. The essential thing is that he saw the inhumanities and knew them to be odious alike to men and God; and as such he denounced them.

If the denunciations uttered by Amos had been directed solely against the enemies of Israel, he might be suspected of that easy patriotism which satisfies itself in scorn of the foreigner. But the first three verses of chapter 2 do not involve Israel. As a matter of fact, Moab's victim, Edom, was one of Israel's bitterest foes; yet Amos applies his principles in this case as vigorously as when Israel herself was the sufferer. In denouncing acts that are offenses against a common humanity, rather than against nations as such, he takes his stand beyond and above the field of racial hatreds and national ambitions.

It is easier to realize the advance involved in this step when we consider our own attitude in the late war. Many of us took for granted that a state of war carried with it its own justification for any cruelty. Our horror, for instance, at the use of poison gas was quickly quieted when we found that our own side could make it and use it. Of course this was war; and Sherman's description of war has never called seriously for correction. But it was war too that Amos was talking about. He would not have said, "These brutalities are necessary in war, and we must put up with them"; but, "If war means such inhumanities, *stop war.*"

## AMOS TEACHES RELIGION

While Amos proclaimed a God of nations who was also a God of humanity, it would be misleading to give the impression that he was interested primarily in politics or even primarily in the principles of humanity as such. He was interested in these; but above them, explaining them and including them, he placed *religion*. He was concerned above all else with the character of God and with the divine will. If he referred to the political situations of his own nation or of other nations, it was only because he saw in these a field in which God himself was active, and in which God's will must rule. If he denounced actions that we would regard as offenses against humanity, even when these actions were directed against an enemy nation, it was only because he had been thrilled with a new vision of God's regard for man as man and had seen the divine importance of a right behavior of men toward each other. The question "Who is my neighbor?" in the great parable of Jesus is really anticipated in spirit by Amos with regard to nations. In a word, his message on this point was "Who is my (national) neighbor?" It is not an easy question for nations to answer.

For him it was religion that was fundamental, and it is abundantly clear that he regarded his whole message as a message of religion. He was not assuming the rôle of statesman or teacher of ethical culture, neither was he offering a gospel of humanity, although all these elements appear in his message; he was first and foremost a religious teacher. As such he demanded a hearing, and only as such has he a claim on us to-day.

It is true that in these ideas he was leading the way toward a much larger view of religion than the one current in his day. Indeed, the expansion of religion to include the affairs of everyday life—the everyday life of business and of politics—is still a novelty. Yet for Amos these were the fields in which religion must operate, and their religious character rested back upon the character and will of God.

To know God as Amos knew him—as a God of honor and



equity—means to realize that men cannot be acceptable in the sight of *this* God unless they themselves possess and exercise the same principles of equity and of honor. This reflection of the life of God in every aspect of the lives of men was for Amos the only true religion, alongside which a religion that contented itself with formal worship, observance of sacred days and seasons, stated offerings, and attendance at the temple was a worthless substitute. Not that these things in themselves were wrong, but that they were not of the essence of man's most vital acknowledgment of the true God.

#### QUESTIONS TO DISCUSS

To what extent do national victories indicate national virtue?

What part has religion to play in the development of an enduring League of Nations?

Is the chief argument against war its cost in money or its cost in men?

Can there be one without the other?

Would the religion taught by Amos involve any difference in present-day politics?

Has it any bearing on the character of candidates or on the acts of office holders?

What advantage or disadvantage would a modern preacher have, as compared with Amos, in the modern separation between church and state?

## CHAPTER IV

### THE CHOSEN PEOPLE

Amos 2. 6-16; 3. 1, 2; 6. 1, 2; 9. 7

#### A PATRIOT WHO WAS ALSO A CRITIC (2. 6-16)

WE are familiar with the idea that the Jewish nation has been called a chosen people. That is, we accept the statement in its reference to the Jews of Bible times, as part of the Bible teachings. But at the present time few Christians regard the modern Jews as a chosen race; while, on the other hand, many a Christian regards his own nation as the one really "chosen" for place and influence in the world of to-day. The words of Amos which make up the present lesson give the interpretation Amos placed upon this idea of a divine "choosing."

He has adroitly enlisted his hearers' attention in his rebukes of other nations, and now, in turning to his own, he has caught them unawares. They cannot charge him with being unpatriotic, for he has denounced the national foes. Yet he has shown a strict neutrality in defending some of these foes against others. If Amos has reserved his sharpest and most searching criticism for his own people, even more will a Christian conscience, without compromise or cowardice, apply Christian standards to the unchristian aspects of his own nation's life to-day.

The list of crimes charged against other nations in the earlier part of Amos' address may profitably be compared with the list here charged against the Hebrews themselves. They are all too common even yet. Consider them: extortion, brutal treatment of the weaker classes, shameless immorality on the part of both fathers and sons, suppression of all original and vigorous religious character (2. 6-8). Such conditions inevitably lead a people toward ruin. They undermine the firmness and integrity of national character and infect the whole social body. They

are perpetrated by those who have power against those who are defenseless.

There is no doubt that to raise a protest against such conditions is to invite the charge that one is a muckraker, a trouble-maker, a bolshevist. Yet it is a fair question whether the criticism and correction of such iniquitous conditions should be left entirely to the oppressed and discontented themselves. Is injustice to go unchallenged until its victims revolt, or shall champions of justice dare to demand a purification of national life in the interest of national integrity? In such a case is silence or protest the truest patriotism? What the anarchist or the revolutionist may do in sheer joy of destruction must be undertaken by loyal patriots in self-sacrificing devotion and in a true spirit of corrective construction, as Amos does in this instance.

The difference will depend on the spirit in which the criticism is made and the end it is designed to serve. I may throw a man down out of sheer malice or to save him from being run over by a locomotive. In both cases the act is the same, but the motives are as far apart as the poles. A house may be blown up by a malicious bomb thrower or by a fire department that in this act will save half a city from destruction by fire. In both cases the acts are the same, but the ends sought and served are utterly foreign to each other.

The voice of criticism—criticism of national institutions, of economic conditions, of labor, or of capital—may come from an anarchist or a patriot; but the hope of the nation depends on our ability and our willingness to distinguish between the two. Keenest criticism may express the loftiest patriotism, and woe to the people who attempt to silence this kind of a critic! They are preparing for themselves the fate that Amos saw awaiting his own nation when he, the true patriot, challenged the heartless prosperity of his own day.

#### A PROPHETIC PARADOX (3. 1, 2)

There is a paradox here which Amos utters in the most drastic fashion. He apparently made no effort to soften

his message. He made no concessions to the feelings that might be hurt by what he said. And there can be no doubt that he made himself greatly disliked by the way he put things. Yet there are times when the only way to bring unpleasant and unwelcome facts to notice is by shocking the hearers into attention. Of course it is much easier to recognize this in connection with people and situations that have long ago passed into history. We ourselves usually resent such shocks, defending ourselves against them and denouncing the man who makes them. It was undoubtedly the same way in the days of Amos. The amazing statement that Amos here makes is directed against the current understanding of the idea expressed in the title of the lesson. No nation that regards itself as the special favorite or representative of the Almighty holds this idea in any but a sense favorable to its own self-esteem. It is "chosen" for happiness, for prosperity, for power.

Amos here takes the familiar and popular statement that had evidently become a national creed in his day—a kind of ancient Declaration of Independence: "You only have I known of all the families of the earth" (3. 2). How comforting! How flattering! What a fine acknowledgment of that superiority to other nations which many a nation has believed true of itself! Amos is orthodox and patriotic up to this point, but after this the deluge: "*Therefore will I punish you for all your iniquities.*" Could anyone imagine such heresy and such treachery? What dismay for those who believed him! What outrageous nonsense for those who refused to understand! "Because God has chosen us, he will overlook all our faults"—so thought the people. "No," said Amos; "for that very reason he will punish you." The people took God for a patron Saint; Amos thinks of him as the great Critic and the great Corrector, whose rebukes and whose punishments are the evidences of his educative purpose and his upright love.

This word "therefore" is the pivot upon which turns the whole question of what God desires and man deserves. It is based on the fundamental principle in Amos' thought that for God to choose a nation means that that nation

must rise to the standards God proposes, and not that God must be brought down to the petty standards of a selfish people, who look upon God as a dignified but subservient promoter of their own little business affairs. And the divine standards concern the welfare of the *whole* people, and not the comfort of a favored few.

#### THE BLINDNESS OF EASE (6. 1, 2)

Men who hold positions of eminence and ease are often very blind to facts seen quite clearly by others. The ease and confidence of the people referred to in 6. 1, 2 took the familiar form seen in much national pride to-day. They are sure of their country's strength and consequently of their own security. They are equally sure of their country's superiority to others. They are sure that disasters which overtook other nations will never harm their own. But they are blind—stupidly, childishly blind. They do not try to see, and they do not wish to see.

“Open thou mine eyes,” wrote the psalmist, “that I may behold . . .” (Psa. 119. 18). The answer to such a prayer is as likely to bring dismay as it is delight. When the things beheld are unsuspected, when they contradict one's dearest hopes, when they reveal error in what was supposed to be truth, when they show weakness and decay where there were supposedly strength and vigor, the prayer becomes a real test of courage and of faith. Who dare risk the vision of more truth than he has yet beheld? He can have no assurance that the later vision will confirm the earlier. When his eyes are truly opened, he may see that he had been terribly wrong rather than comfortably right. It is a dangerous prayer.

Sometimes the new light is forced upon those who “love darkness rather than light because their deeds are evil” (John 3. 19), and here Amos ruthlessly tears from the eyes of these careless and confident ones the wrappings of selfishness and conceit. They did not need to look far to realize their own danger. There was the city of Calneh in northern Syria, or Hamath the splendid, or even the well-known Philistine city of Gath. These places were at least as important and as opulent as their own Samaria or Zion;

yet see how they were overtaken, conquered, and brought low. Their wealth did not defend them, nor their eminence deliver them. And Amos here holds them up as warnings of the true results of iniquitous living. He is here doing the kind of thing that every honorable and upright friend of one's people must do. But to do it with any real power one must not only have insight and courage: he must also be above the reproach of pettiness and partisanship.

### THE GOD OF ALL NATIONS (9. 7)

Still another word of Amos speaks this critical spirit which is nevertheless a spirit of profoundest loyalty—a spirit whose apparent harshness is only the utterance of deepest desire that the people might be awakened to God's real desire for them and their own true relation to him.

If it were spoken by an American in modern times, it might run: "Are you not as the Chinese to me, O Americans? Did I not unite your thirteen colonies into one great nation, build up the Canadians to an imperial dominion, and make the Germans a world power?"

One of the experiences of life, often bitter but always illuminating, is the discovery that others have the same rights and privileges as oneself. "Through childhood and early youth one accepts the easy idea that God is his unconditional support and defender, and that other people are under obligations to put into effect this good will of God toward oneself. If these other people do this, they are good; if they do not, they are bad. Then, suddenly, there comes to us the disconcerting realization that the others have the same rights as ourselves. They too regard themselves as the center of a circle of which we form a part, and which they suppose is to minister to them, and thus carry out God's will. This realization is the awakening in us of the ethical principle that means a feeling for others, for mankind."<sup>1</sup>

Difficult as this experience is in the case of individuals, it is even harder for nations. One's love of country has in it enough idealism to obscure its true character from any

<sup>1</sup>Niebergall.

but a truly awakened conscience. Much religion, so far as it relates to one's country, often goes no further than a belief that one's own country has preference and precedence in the sight of God. But here again Amos is unflinching and inexorable. True to that high ethical principle which is even yet beyond us, he asserts that to God it is all one whichever nation is concerned—Negroes, Philistines, Syrians, or Hebrews. He is the God of *all* nations.

Amos has here emancipated the thought of God from its narrow connection with a particular people. God ceases to be a private patron and becomes *the God of all the world*. This conception marked an epoch in man's long progress toward a knowledge of God. It anticipates that thought of God as Father which is one of the most precious revelations of the Christian faith. In its light the history of the world will one day be written, not as a history of the world as seen by and in the interest of American or British, French or German, but from the point of view of man and of God.

From Amos' point of view a *chosen* people must be a *choosing* people. The divine choice is indicated and vindicated by those actions on the part of the people which show them as choosing the things which God desires. And it is further clear that Amos believed God to desire such actions because his own character would have led him to act in the way Amos set forth. God was no arbitrary tyrant demanding obedience for the sake of exercising his own authority and glorifying his own power; he was, in his own nature, just and kind, and his desire for men was that they should be and act like himself. He chose them that they might choose him.

#### QUESTIONS TO DISCUSS

How far is criticism of national institutions compatible with patriotism?

Does God punish nations to-day? If so, do such punishments indicate these nations to be God's people?

In what sense were the Hebrews God's people? Whose people were the Assyrians?

Are there any grounds for supposing that God approves

the present form of government of the United States? What are they?

If *our* God is the God of *all* nations, what must be our attitude toward all other nations? If a "chosen people" must be a "choosing people," how can a nation show that it chooses God?



## CHAPTER V

### THE DECEITFULNESS OF RICHES

Amos 3. 9-11; 4. 1-3; 6. 3-6

#### A MENACE TO NATIONAL VIGOR (3. 9-11)

IF one of us had lived in Palestine in the days of Amos and had wanted to inquire into the state of the country, to whom should one have gone? To some ignorant laborer? To some slave woman? Of course not. Then, as now, he would have gone to some leading merchant or government official. These are the men who are regarded as representing the country and as really directing its affairs; and, of course, this is largely true. But it is fair to ask, "What proportion of the population do these conspicuous individuals represent, and on what do they base their right to act as representatives?"

In our own time it is quite clear that, despite our democratic system of election by ballot, the men finally to be voted for are but few in number, especially for the higher offices, and even these few are only too often put forward by powerful influences that are far more concerned about serving their own interests than about serving the interests of the public.

As a consequence the answers such men might give to the question proposed above would represent the views of only a part of the whole nation. Speaking for that part, these contemporaries of the prophet would have told us that business was booming, prospects were excellent, and the country was never so prosperous. If they spoke for themselves, this would have been true, but it would have left quite out of account the many whose lives were spent in unconsidered and unmeasured toil—men, women, and children whose work was not won by love nor inspired by a promise of ease, but forced by the fear of poverty. And these hosts of toilers had no time, no incentive, no ability, to se-

lect and to secure representatives of their own. They simply had nothing to say. It is the tragedy of the poor that they are unorganized and inarticulate. They are the ones who pay the real price of advertised prosperity; and back of all national prosperities and securities that the world has known down to the present day stand the mute hosts of those who toil and endure, but who may not enjoy.

When tumults break out, because some act of oppression has bitten more deeply for a moment, they are vigorously and sternly suppressed, with a great glow of righteous indignation against lawlessness and against disturbers of the public peace.

These conditions are not instances of primitive depravity any more than they are the late development of a money-mad race. They have existed wherever and whenever money-madness has touched the hearts and minds of men. The madness shows itself, even in its milder forms, by a pursuit of the power and the pleasure that wealth affords and by a heartlessness that pays no regard to the methods by which the wealth was gained or to the sources from which it was produced.

From time to time there arise men who see these conditions in their relation not to a small group, but to the welfare of the people as a whole; and against these conditions these men raise courageous protest. Their challenge does not grow out of a narrow class-consciousness that seeks to play off one class against another or to arouse those who have not to a revolt against those who have. They are true patriots and they desire the true life and health of their nation, that it may take a worthy place among the nations of the world. They are not *class-conscious* so much as *nation-conscious*, and they see that humanity and justice are essential elements in a noble and enduring national life. They regard the ease-loving self-indulgence of the few at the expense of the many as a more insidious danger and a more threatening foe than the armies of a foreign enemy.

Amos was one of the earliest to raise this protest, and this is the sort of thing he was driving at in the first part of our lesson (3. 9-11). If Amos had lived to-day and

had referred to the United States, he might have said: "Send word to Mexico and to Canada; call them in to investigate the life of our great cities, to see what unrest, oppression, and injustice are there. All powers of defense are destroyed; the country is ripe for plunder. This is plain for anybody to see. Even foreigners would be justified in condemning us, and if we got into war we would stand no chance!"

Despite the apparent disloyalty of such words the principle back of them is a true one. Despite the opposition inevitably aroused by such a message and by such a messenger Amos was right. History has been one long series of illustrations confirming his position; and no one can see a people's growing devotion to extravagance and amusement without realizing that they are entering on the path that has led to the downfall of every empire the world has known and without realizing that one who tries to arouse the people to their danger and to stem the tide of recklessness is that people's truest friend.

It is a lesson that nations have never yet learned, and it remains to be seen whether our own country will be sufficiently self-disciplined to be teachable. But one thing is sure—the lesson will not and cannot be learned unless everyone who realizes the situation gives himself courageously and unceasingly to the proclamation of the message that, though uttered so long ago, is still unheeded.

#### THE GUILT OF WOMEN (4. 1-3)

The treatment of women has long been regarded as a kind of touchstone by which to estimate the degree of culture a nation has reached. Our own country stands alone in the high respect paid to women. People of other nations are sometimes inclined to smile at us for what they consider our oversentimental attitude, which seems to them a sign of weakness on the part of the men and a situation unwholesome for the women. However that may be, it is none the less true that in this country women have a freedom and a position granted nowhere else.

Women, however, cannot escape the responsibilities of their privileges, and *the way they conduct themselves* is

an even more significant evidence of culture than the way they are treated by men. If they give themselves up to extravagance and gayety, if they debase themselves in wine and wickedness, if they use their influence on their husbands and lovers to supply exorbitant demands, then, says Amos, they share equally in the guilt of the men who humor them; they are heartless, blind, degraded, they are mere (this is Amos' own harsh word) "cattle."

One occasionally sees women, overindulged, overfed, overdressed, corpulent, and coarse, who almost justify the brutal word which Amos used; but the physical appearance does not always supply a true measure of the inner spirit. Some of the most famous sinners among womankind are reported to have been as beautiful as they were depraved.

The power of a good woman for good or a wicked woman for evil can hardly be overestimated. The beautiful and tender associations immediately brought to mind by the words "mother," "sister," "wife," are familiar testimonies not only to the position woman holds, but even more to that ideal position we instinctively feel she ought to hold. The lessening modesty exhibited by girls and women in dress, in the social dance, in the use of tobacco, in the liberties they allow their escorts, cannot but arouse apprehension in the mind of anyone who knows that the sanctity of womanhood is a spiritual barometer of a nation's life and who consequently realizes the wreck that awaits a people whose women throw themselves away.

Religion cannot ignore this situation. It has been the custom for some to suppose that religion has nothing to do with such questions. Religion, they think, should confine itself to prayer and praise, to Bible reading and church attendance. The fact that such questions are raised in the Bible, however, shows very clearly the attitude of the Bible writers; and it is perfectly clear that Amos regards the proper treatment of these and similar subjects as the very essence of religion.

#### LUXURY TRIUMPHANT (6. 3-6)

In a few words Amos has painted a classic picture of

those who use their wealth for what many to-day would call "a good time." "This is the life—wine, women, and song." They are all there—the wine, women, and song—in that little three-verse pen picture that Amos drew. Wealth, extravagance, dissipation consume the time and the attention of this high society. What banquets they served! What luxurious furniture! What rare wines! What wonderful music! The splendor of these affairs filled the town. Everybody heard about them and had something to say about them. Amos too heard about them and he too had something to say—something as rough and as rude as he himself would have seemed had he suddenly entered the hall where a feast was in progress.

He did more than describe the feast: he saw the empty, aimless hearts and minds of the feasters. For the country at large the feasters had no concern—the country on whose security their own security depended, the country whose welfare was the essential condition of their own, the country whose poverty and distress they themselves helped to create. "They are not grieved for the affliction of Joseph." By "Joseph" Amos meant the whole northern kingdom, usually called "Israel." But what was this "affliction" of which he speaks? Were there not ease and wealth on all sides? Affliction? The happy and comfortable find it hard to believe in the distress of others. What they do not see never bothers them. "*They are not grieved.*" They care nothing for the distress, the poverty, the toil, the starvation, which paid for their luxury.

"For them the Ceylon diver held his breath  
 And went all naked to the hungry shark;  
 For them his ears gushed blood; for them in death  
 The seal on the cold ice with piteous bark  
 Lay full of darts; for them alone did see the  
 A thousand men in troubles wide and dark;  
 Half-ignorant, they turned an easy wheel  
 That set sharp wracks at work to pinch and peel."

In our modern democracy, depending as it does on the earnest, intelligent coöperation of all citizens, there are many who ignore not only the poor but the country itself.

<sup>1</sup> Keats: "Isabella, or the Pot of Basil."

Why should they care if political or economic problems threaten to undo the land? They take no interest in the annual elections, do not care about issues or candidates, and do not even take the trouble to register or to vote. "They are not grieved for the affliction of Joseph." It is no wonder that the poverty-stricken do not care. They cannot. Why should they? But what of those whose wealth and position permit untold helpfulness and noble service? That these are not "grieved" for their country's welfare is quite as serious a situation as that they should waste their substance in riotous living.

There was One, long after Amos, whom the world sometimes thinks of as "a Man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief." His grieving was not for himself but for his brethren. He saw and felt the bitterness of their lot. He marked out the only path along which men may expect to find a common welfare. His Spirit alone can suffice to awaken and to direct those whose care for themselves and for their country will be noble and worthy, because it is "rooted and fixed in God."

There is no denying that such passages as those included in the present lesson are almost bitter in their uncompromising severity. The prophet makes no concessions to expediency. He uses the harshest terms to describe those whom he denounces. He is well aware that they are the élite of the land, that they are rich, powerful, and "representative." He knew that he would incur their ridicule, their scorn, and, finally, their wrath; but none of these things moved him. In other words, he had all the marks of men whom some to-day call radicals. And if this is clear at this late day, it was tenfold more obvious at the time.

The recognition of this fact is of considerable importance in the understanding of the Bible. It means that there are forms of radicalism—radicalism that challenges the social order—which have a rightful place in God's scheme of revelation. The divine messengers are sometimes storms and lightnings (Psa. 104. 4) and sometimes stormy, fiery prophets whose words smite and slay (Hos. 6. 5). God has seen fit to raise up and to bless these men, with all

their vehemence. Radicals in thought and in word, they are no less men of God. They go to extremes. They set forth ideas that later prophets, as radical as themselves, do not hesitate to modify and even to contradict. Indeed, in nearly every instance the Biblical prophets were men of this character, and it is this kind of men who have most signally advanced the cause of God and have enlarged the scope of the divine revelation.

They are not comfortable men to live with, but they themselves neither seek nor offer comfort. They call to others to take up the message they proclaim, not because they wish to be radical for the mere sake of being radical, not because they wish to involve society in turmoil and revolution, but because, in view of the conditions they see about them, they feel that nothing can be done but to strike at once to the heart of the matter; and they lay the ax at the root of the tree (Luke 3. 9). He who would follow the prophets must bid farewell to ease and comfort. The vigor and rigor of this small but mighty company make them seem stern and forbidding. But they are the ones who prepare the way for Him of whom it is said "he spake, and it was done; he commanded, and it stood fast" (Psa. 33. 9).

#### QUESTIONS TO DISCUSS

What weakness in our Nation can be traced to the luxury and power made possible by great wealth?

What opportunity have the rich and strong really to know how the poor and weak have to live?

Would Amos have had anything to say on the question of women in politics?

Can expensive houses, clothes, and entertainments be justified on the ground that they keep money in circulation and give employment to men and women?

Would you call Amos a "radical"?

## CHAPTER VI

### THE PROPHET AND THE BUSINESS MAN

Amos 5. 7-12; 8. 4-7

#### A PROPHET'S SKETCHBOOK

ONE of the surprises that come over and over again to the careful Bible student, and especially to the student of the prophets, is the strangely modern character of many of the subjects with which the prophets dealt. After due allowance is made for differences of time, language, customs, and the rest, there remain passages so strikingly appropriate to our own situations that they might have been written yesterday instead of twenty-five hundred years ago.

A good illustration of this fact appears in the present lesson. Amos has here sketched the business man of the ancient Hebrew world—his methods, his customers, and his “pull” with the courts. The picture is true not only for its own time, but it will be true as long as the traffic of the world is carried on for the enrichment of the few rather than for the service of all. It is true that the amazing developments of modern business far surpass anything of the kind the ancient world produced, but certain traits reappear in all periods of commercial history, and the man sketched here is true to type.

Note that Amos has given us a remarkable number and variety of these pen portraits. His book constitutes a kind of portrait gallery, in which one may find nearly all the typical characters of that day. At first one does not realize how clear and numerous these are. They are done so concisely, and most of our Bible reading is done so rapidly, that only after persistent attention does one begin to get the vivid portrayals of which Amos was such a master. Men and women, rich and poor, judge and priest, victor and vanquished, proud profiteer and impoverished consumer, throng the pages of this diminutive tract we call the book of Amos. And they are not huddled together in



an indistinguishable mass; each is as clear-cut as a cameo and so convincingly outlined that one feels instinctively that they are absolutely true to life.

Here is our business man, as Amos sees him, in all his characteristic zeal for the slogan "Business is business." He is against those foolish religious customs that interfere with trade. "New moon and sabbath"—sacred days in which business gave way to religion—were only irksome to him. He had no sympathy with such a religion and he hated to have the stream of trade interrupted (8. 5). When we think of what has been happening in the wheat and flour market during the last couple of years, it is interesting to see that similar questions were rife in Amos' day. Here are wheat merchants profiteering (as we might say) by charging high prices for short weights and for an inferior article. Apparently they "got by" with this sort of thing without serious interference.

#### BAD MOTIVES IN BUSINESS

It must be admitted that irregularities of this kind are still matters of course in the Orient, and exactness in that day was hardly to be looked for when weights, measures, and money lacked the definite standards established by modern scientific methods. George A. Barton writes:

A glance at the weights here described makes it evident that the standards of the ancient Hebrews were not exact. If these are representative weights, the shekel must have varied from two hundred to more than three hundred grains troy. This is what one acquainted with the Palestine of to-day would expect. The peasants still use field stones as weights, selecting one that is approximately of the weight they desire. Even among the merchants of modern Jerusalem, where one would expect more exact standards than among the peasantry, odd scraps of old iron are used for weights. . . . Indeed, of the weights found at Gezer, so many were under the average standard, and so many above it, that the inference lay close at hand that many men had one set of weights by which to purchase and another set by which to sell.<sup>1</sup>

A standard coinage, issued by a government, necessarily obviates the delay, the bother, and the easy inaccuracy of

<sup>1</sup>*Archæology and the Bible*, page 161.

weighing out a certain amount of metal (gold, silver, or bronze) whenever a payment had to be made; but Amos lived long before the day of a coinage of this kind.

It is all the more significant that in the face of a certain amount of inexactness, which might be natural and excusable under the circumstances, Amos denounces the practice that is fraudulent as a matter of principle. Such action is utterly foreign to the character of God as Amos understands him and so must necessarily be foreign to any man who desires divine approval. For God cannot approve any act or principle which contradicts his own nature.

Much has been said and written, and vastly more will be said and written about the iniquities of trade and the possibilities of overcoming or preventing them, but all will be vain until the heart of the trader is touched to new motives and new aims. He has sought profits at the expense of his fellows, and the world generally has ignored the price the people have had to pay in order to provide these private profits. He has valued his property vastly more than the persons of those who developed and protected it, and the world has closed its eyes to the folly of permitting such a sacrifice of man upon the altar of Mammon. There are in the Bible many denunciations against the idea of human sacrifice and against those who "made their children to pass through the fire." Horrible as such practices seem to us, they were at least done in the supposed interest of deity and as acts desired by the gods. But what can be said and what would some of those old prophets have said of those who make men, women, and children pass through the fire of our cotton mills, glass factories, and steel plants—a fire that burns out the real life of the victims yet dooms them to a continued existence deadened in every faculty? And this sacrifice is made not at all in the interest of any deity, even the most barbarous and primitive, but solely in the interest of the selfish and self-appointed deities who claim the products of the sacrifice.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> If this statement seems unduly severe, let it be recalled that in the fall of 1902, during the strike of the anthracite coal miners in Pennsylvania, Mr. Baer of the Reading Railroad publicly claimed that he held the coal properties *by divine right*;

## POOR MAN'S JUSTICE

Amos sees as clearly as any modern investigator that the brunt of this burden falls on the poor. They have to pay the prices asked or do without their shoes or their flour (8. 6). If they pay they must take what they get whether the quality is what it ought to be or not. If it be asked why they do not bring their cases to court, it must be said that justice is the most expensive commodity on the market, and few, if any, of the poor can afford it. So far as our own courts are concerned, this is due primarily not to any reluctance on the part of the court to administer justice impartially to all, but to the traditional machinery of the law, which, in the course of its development, has resulted in raising almost insuperable obstacles in the path of those who most need protection.<sup>2</sup>

In Oriental countries justice is notoriously difficult to obtain, and Amos is both daring and original in the way he strikes at a situation recognized by all and opposed by none but the victims, who were usually helpless in the matter. His denunciation of the way justice toward the poor is perverted by the bribes of the rich (5. 7-12) takes its place alongside his denunciation of the fraudulent conduct of business as a scathing indictment not alone of his own people but of all peoples among whom these evils are found—and where are they not?

## THE CONSCIENCE OF A NATION

It needs only a moment's reflection to realize that this indictment cannot be made until one sees the facts of so-

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and as recently as December, 1920, the *Wall Street Journal* said: "When the real adjustment comes, the unskilled worker finishes where he belongs—at the bottom of the list. He will be able to live on two dollars a day when he is lucky enough to get that amount regularly. He will thank goodness that he has no family of five or, indeed, anybody but himself to support; nor will any employer pay him on a basis of any such fatherhood." The New York *Christian Advocate*, from which this quotation is taken, entitles its article "The Red Rag" and says, among other comments, that, "to the *Journal* writer the unskilled laborer is no more than a lump of coal or a ball of crude rubber, nothing but a necessary factor in production of wealth."

<sup>2</sup>See *Justice and the Poor*, a report issued by the Carnegie Foundation and carrying the indorsement of no less an authority than Elihu Root.

cial life with an unprejudiced eye and then is moved to challenge them on the basis of high principle. Amos saw the facts and was urged to speak by the high principle which refused to be silenced. Looking back upon his position from the vantage point of our own later day, we can see without difficulty that in Amos the awakening conscience of the Hebrew people found a voice.

Amos himself was, of course, a Hebrew. The fact that he belonged to a pitifully small minority, so far as these ideas were concerned, made him no less a member of his own race and a citizen of his own country. Time alone could tell whether he or those fellow citizens who opposed him were on the path of true progress or most truly expressed the characteristic genius of their people. And time has told. There is no doubt to-day that Amos represented the best and highest tendencies of his time. The inclusion of his book in the sacred canon of the Hebrews is proof enough that subsequent generations of his own people recognized his greatness.

There is something strange, at first, in the idea that men whom a nation honors as its greatest men were in their day that nation's severest critics. Yet that is true of all the prophets. No nation has ever been more sternly or more bitterly rebuked than the Hebrew nation was by its own prophets; but the true life of the Hebrew spirit is seen in the fact that, though belated, it awoke to some sense of where its true greatness appeared. This means that the nation came to regard as part of its most precious literature, its sacred Scriptures, those protests which revealed as well as rebuked conditions that other nations accepted as matters of course—protests that challenged the accepted order of social, political, and religious life. Indeed, at the time they were uttered many of the Hebrews themselves resented these criticisms and opposed the critic. The resentments and oppositions are all but forgotten; the critic and the criticisms endure.

Why is this? Because those to whom the Scriptures have come are dimly, blindly aware that somehow these Scriptures contain a divine wisdom that is able to make a nation wise unto salvation—a wisdom that finds its work in

establishing an equitable social order. That divine wisdom has been only partially apprehended, much still awaits recognition and application; but it is there and it will some day appear. "There is nothing hid save that it should be manifested."

### GOD SPEAKS TO-DAY

How shall this wisdom be brought to light? In two ways: First, through the awakening conscience of the nation itself as embodied and made vocal in the persons of men and women who are there to meet just this emergency. Such men look with the clear-seeing eye of an artist upon the world about them, they look within their own hearts, they look into the Scriptures and read its imperishable words, they look to God, the Father and Lover of mankind; and the rays that shine out from all these sources are brought to a burning focus in their hearts. They realize the heavenly joy that would come to the world if men would walk in this light. They utter their denunciations of the accepted state of affairs. Their protests echo from city to city, arousing the same resentments and oppositions which met such protests in days of old. They call for the new heavens and the new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness. And those who have ears to hear know that once more the voice of God is calling to his people.

Second, through an awakening church. True, there are those who regard the church as hastening to decay, who realize that every institution tends to become a lifeless, rigid thing, unable to respond to the needs of current life. Yet in the last few years the church has shown some surprising signs of vitality. These signs appear especially in just the field with which the present lesson has been concerned—namely, business. There is not room here to set down the official action of the great Protestant denominations, the Roman Catholic Church, and other religious bodies that set forth in terms appropriate to the present time the call of religion to a reconstruction of the social order according to the principles which found their earliest proclamation in the words of Amos. In this call the church voices the awakening conscience of the community,

speaks with a truly prophetic spirit, and moves on to that leadership which is rightfully hers whenever and as long as she listens obediently to the voice of her Lord.

#### QUESTIONS TO DISCUSS

What do Amos' character sketches show of his powers of observation?

Are there any in your community whose characters Amos would have sketched? How about yourself?

Are methods used in business to-day which aid dishonesty? Is this due to accident, ignorance, or to set purpose?

Are the poor able to pay as much for legal advice as large corporations? What bearing has this on the administration of justice to everybody impartially?

Does religion encourage us to reveal and to rebuke such conditions or to keep still and not make trouble?

What is God's word to-day to the church in the matter of business? How is the church responding to it?

## CHAPTER VII

### TRUE WORSHIP

Amos 3. 13-15; 4. 4, 5; 4-6, 14, 15, 21 27

#### THE PLACE WHERE WORSHIP WAS FASHIONABLE

ONE of the best-known incidents recorded in the book of Genesis is the one told of Jacob, who "lighted upon a certain place" on the evening of the fateful day of his flight from his brother Esau (Gen. 28. 10-19). This "certain place" was none other than the "Beth-el" of Amos 3. 14. Its fame went even further back. It was supposed to have been the place where Abraham, having come to a land which God would show him, built an altar to Jehovah (Gen. 12. 8).

As the years passed, the town at this place became a city of more or less importance. But not until after the death of Solomon, when the whole group of northern tribes (that is, Israel proper) threw off the yoke of the Davidic dynasty, did the city reach its greatest glory. It then became virtually the capital of the northern kingdom—the city where the king dwelt. Not the least of its importance was due to its sacred history. There was no shrine in the land that was more venerable, and when the great altar was set up, with images of the "gods which brought Israel up out of Egypt" (1 Kings 12. 28; compare Exod. 32. 4), it was natural that the people should accept it as indeed the place of "the king's shrine and a royal temple" (Amos 7. 13). What Jerusalem later became to the Jews, what Mecca became to the Mohammedans, what Rome became to Europe in the Middle Ages, Bethel was becoming to the northern Israelites.

Here, one might think, would be the best kind of place in the world to preach religion; and so it would—if the religion preached was of the kind the city practiced. But Amos, a prophet of a new order of things, saw in Bethel

a symbol and center of wickedness. As Rome inflamed Luther, so, two thousand years earlier, had Bethel inflamed Amos. One's idea of God necessarily determines one's idea of worship; and no one could think of God as Amos did and suppose that the worship officially conducted in Bethel could have divine approval.

What kind of worship did the God of Amos desire? That is the question whose answer, as given by Amos himself, has placed Amos in the front rank of the religious teachers of the world, has revolutionized our ideas of religion, and has helped to establish the unique place held by the Hebrew people as the bearers of a divine revelation.

#### THE WORSHIP AMOS CONDEMNED

Amos' answer was twofold. In the first place, he said, Jehovah did not desire the kind of worship Bethel stood for. But he did not say it as mildly as that; he said it fiercely and in bitter scorn. Could sarcasm be more biting than "Come to Beth-el, and transgress; for this is the sort of thing you like"? The words in 4. 4, 5 are all in this strain, and their harshness should not be overlooked. Amos did not mince matters, did not compromise in the slightest degree, made no allowance for possible exceptions, but struck out from the shoulder to smite the sin he saw.

When we read such hard words, our first thought is that there must have been something so desperately wicked about the popular worship that the people ought to have known better and ought to have acted differently. When, however, we notice the practices which Amos condemned, we cannot but be amazed at the idea of finding in just these things any ground for such rebukes. Notice what he specifies: sacrifice, tithes, thanksgivings, free-will offerings (4. 4, 5); feast days, solemn assemblies, music, both vocal and instrumental (5. 21-27). These constitute the very stuff of which most religion (even yet) is made; and will Amos, with one daring gesture, sweep them all away as not only useless but wicked?

The ceremonies and ritual that Amos saw at Bethel—that is, these observances he rebuked—are generally regarded as having come down from very ancient times, sanc-



tioned by Moses himself; and there can be no doubt that the people at large obeyed them in good faith and in good conscience. Yet Amos goes so far as to say that in the early days, when the Hebrews were in the wilderness under the guidance of Moses, they did not bring sacrifices and offerings to Jehovah.

If Amos was right about this, we shall have to revise some of our ideas of what actually occurred during those years in the wilderness—a subject that would carry us far beyond the proper limits of the lesson before us. It may be said in passing, however, that this word in Amos tends to confirm the view of recent scholars that much of the elaborate system of worship observed later among the Hebrews grew up during the centuries following Moses. However that may be, it is clear that Amos had no regard for them, and that there was nothing in their past history, as there was nothing in their current practice, to prevent him from denouncing them in the name of the Lord.

Perhaps the radical character of Amos' position will stand out more clearly if it is recognized that he includes in his list acts that are urged upon us to-day as necessary parts of our own religion. Consider the whole matter of tithing and of free-will offerings, which Amos mentions specifically in 4. 4, 5. Consider the whole matter of church attendance, special days, and special music, which he speaks of in 5. 21-27. Are these not exactly the things that make up a large part of our own church life? We know they are. They are no different, either in spirit or in fact, from the acts upon which Amos pours out his scorn.

This view of religion comes with something of a shock to one who does not realize what radicals the prophets were. He begins to feel as those first hearers of Amos felt when it seemed to them that Amos was pulling down about their ears the whole splendid structure of religious life and practice, which at the first had been ordained by God himself and had been confirmed by generations of reverent and obedient observance.

Yet it is also clear that if Amos had simply approved and encouraged the type of religion he saw about him at Bethel,

we should never have heard of him. The men who do no more than indorse the well-established institutions of their time are not the ones who make history, whether they act in the field of politics, art, science, or religion. Progress always springs from protest. Advance means change. No customs are sacred simply because they are ancient. The test of all life (including the religious life) is its ability to survive the upheavals caused by new visions of truth. It is only by means of such a process that the indestructible elements can be revealed. The "yet once more" (Heb. 12. 27) has perennial applications; and repeatedly, in succeeding ages, it "signifieth the removing of those things that are shaken, . . . that those things which cannot be shaken may remain."

#### THE WORSHIP AMOS DESIRED

Amos, however, had no satisfaction in destruction for its own sake. He wished to pull down only that he might build up. And the second part of his answer is positive and constructive. He said, in effect: "There is a kind of worship that Jehovah really desires. He really desires that men should 'seek him'—not his temple but himself—; and there are plain, straightforward acts of worship which will be abundantly acceptable to him." But how different these acts are from those heretofore regarded as worshipful! This new worship that Amos proclaims finds its expression in hating evil and loving good, in seeing not only that justice is administered in the place of justice ("the gate"), but that it overflows the land like a flood (5. 14, 15, 24).

There had come into the heart of Amos a revelation of that tremendous principle that a city's religion is not to be measured by its churches and cathedrals, its churchly ceremonies, offerings, and solemn assemblies (and how solemn they are!), but by its treatment of the "righteous," the "just," and the "poor" in their citizen life (2. 6, 7; 5. 12; 8. 4-6). He does not ask for mercy nor for charity, but for justice. In our separation of church and state we have assigned worship to the church and justice to the

state. The position of Amos is that the exercise of justice is the kind of worship God desires.

What Amos means is just this: Acceptable worship must be what God likes (compare "this is what *you* like to do," 4. 5), and God likes justice between man and man; especially does he like the poor and the weak to receive justice at the hands of the rich and the strong. And that means, stated even more generally, that Amos finds the religious center of gravity in man's behavior to his fellow men. He probably would say that man's attitude toward man is his attitude toward God. The attitude toward man is not a by-product, a side issue, an accessory, of one's attitude toward God; it *is* that attitude. The field of true worship, as Amos presents it, is thus entirely shifted from ceremony to service, from ritual to righteousness, from the mysterious to the matter-of-fact, from the priestly to the practical.

There is no denying the fact that if Amos was right, it was necessary to make a wholesale revision of the religious ideas of his day; and in so far as those ideas are current in our own day, the same wholesale revision is necessary if we are to accept Amos' point of view. He held that the essential field of religion, of true worship, was not in a church building, but in the place of daily business, not in the celebration of special days, but in the humanizing of "week" days, not the church use of money, but the commercial use of money, not in private advantage but in public justice.

It has long been the custom among us to regard business, week-days, commerce, and the courts as secular instead of sacred. This is where Amos completely shifts the emphasis. These are sacred. In them men are to worship. The acts and days and places that custom has so long called sacred Amos will have nothing to do with; but in the common life, day by day and man to man, he demands, with an insistence that the centuries cannot silence, that men shall exercise the basic principles of humanity and justice as the pure expression of the worship God desires. To seek these is to seek God. To know these as the foundations of all righteous living is to know God as he is. Until

we are ready to address ourselves to a thoroughgoing application of this rule of Amos in our church and community life, it will be idle to discuss the possibility of applying the Golden Rule. The rule of Amos precedes the rule of Christ.

#### AMOS SPOKE WITH A POET'S PASSION

The prevailing tone, which sounds through nearly all the words of Amos, is so stern and so forbidding that it is of special importance not to let his denunciations hide his demands. He has this positive message that, if men would accept and practice, undoubtedly carries within the seed of all the highest developments of a nation's life; and his interpretation of true religion in terms of common life is what gives him his undying fame.

It may be asked whether he was quite as severe as the words of his book would indicate. Did he really mean that ceremonial worship was wicked? Did he mean that special times and seasons, special acts and offerings, were really odious in the sight of God? Or would he have said that these were all right provided the other things—humanity and justice—prevailed throughout the daily life? Would he have said that if humanity and justice were made supreme and dominant, the temple and its ritual would have been harmless?

Unfortunately, we cannot answer these questions. We have nothing but his book upon which to base an answer; and the position taken in his book is the one set forth above. It is a familiar fact, however, that when a great soul has been set on fire by a new and overwhelming revelation of truth and duty he is not likely to stop in the utterance of his great message to discuss pros and cons and to weigh modifications and exceptions. The prophet, like the poet, "mad with heavenly fire, flings men his song white-hot." It would be as useless, as it would be impertinent, to raise questions of application and consistency. The prophets proclaim the mighty principles that, divinely revealed, divinely direct the lives of men toward divine goals. We lesser souls, who cannot reach so high, nor see so far, can deal with ways and means by which the great

principles become personal possessions. And this we will do if only the spirit of the prophets kindles ours!

#### QUESTIONS TO DISCUSS

What would Amos have thought of the Christmas and Easter programs in our churches and Sunday schools?

What religious acts referred to by Amos appear in present-day religion?

Does he speak of them with approval or disapproval? Why?

Would he be regarded as a heretic to-day? By whom?

Is his idea of true worship easier or harder to carry out than the customary "church activities"? Why?

How and in what degree can our churches be inspired by the spirit of the prophets? Whose spirit was that?

## CHAPTER VIII

### ARE NATIONAL DISASTERS DIVINE PUNISHMENTS?

Amos 3. 3-6; 4. 6-13; 5. 1, 12, 18-20

#### AMOS' NEW DOCTRINE

ONE of the differences between Amos and the prophets who went before him is found in the way he speaks of the political welfare of the nation. The earlier prophets were devoted to the political defense and advancement of the national prosperity. They usually appeared when the nation was threatened by a foreign foe and, in the name of Jehovah, roused the people to patriotic enthusiasm. They were intense nationalists and felt that Jehovah, the God of Israel, was bound to protect his people and to preserve the nation.

In Amos an entirely new type of prophet arose. These prophets of the later type "look not on the outward appearance, but on the heart" (1 Sam. 16. 7). They see clearly the foreign foes that approach from without, but they are more concerned with the moral and religious enemies within. They realize that a nation's most serious foes are the social sins which weaken the body politic. On this account they do not regard foreign foes solely as political dangers; they see in them agents by whom God will punish a weakened and wicked nation. This means that, quite contrary to the national feeling aroused by the earlier prophets, these later prophets can view the downfall of the nation not as an ordinary political calamity but as a punishment sent by Jehovah. According to this later view the national disaster does not mean Jehovah's defeat, as the earlier prophets would have felt, but shows him in his true character as a God of righteousness, who punishes a wicked nation even though it be his own.

It is not difficult to see that this apparent indifference of the later prophets to the nation's political security would seem to the people to be irreligious and unpatriotic—irreligious because it contradicted the orthodox idea of Jehovah as the defender of his people; unpatriotic because it persistently proclaimed the downfall of the nation.

The passages which make up the present lesson set forth this new and highly unwelcome idea—namely, that the nation's position was in no wise secure, that it was threatened with disastrous invasion, and that Jehovah himself was bringing this disaster upon it. Before taking up the message as a whole, let us notice the separate passages.

#### WHO BUT JEHOVAH DIRECTS THESE EVENTS?

A group of comparisons, such as the Oriental loves, leading up to the point and climax of the whole, is given in 3. 3-6. Its true character is so obscured by the way it is ordinarily printed that it is worth reproducing in a more appropriate form:

“Do two walk together, except they be agreed?  
 Doth a lion roar in the forest when he hath no prey?  
 Doth a young lion give forth his voice, if he have taken  
 nothing?  
 Doth a bird fall in a snare upon the earth where no snare is  
 set for him?  
 Doth a snare spring up from the ground, unless something is  
 to be caught?  
 Doth a trumpet sound in the city, without alarming the  
 people?  
 Doth disaster come upon a city, *unless Jehovah brings it?*”

This series of seven questions (a significant number) is intended, of course, in the sense of direct statements. Amos has some definite disaster in mind, and apparently others, too, realize that some danger threatened. But it would not have occurred to them that Jehovah should bring it. So, much as one to-day would build up an argument, Amos, in true Oriental fashion, heaps up illustrative questions, all of which demand the answer he desires for the last and chief question of all; the conclusion being: “No; if disaster comes upon a city, Jehovah brings it.”

“PREPARE TO MEET THY GOD”

The next passage, 4. 6-13, portrays a variety of disasters that have befallen the nation from time to time. However the Hebrews had previously accounted for them, Amos feels that their true source had been unrecognized, and that in reality they had been sent by Jehovah. And, in part because their source and purpose had not been understood, these calamities had failed to lead the people to repentance.

The refrain “Ye have not returned unto me” (verses 6, 8, 9, 10, 11) shows the passage to be composed of stanzas, somewhat similar to those in 1. 3—2. 16. As in that earlier passage, so here the concluding stanza differs strikingly from those which precede. In the present instance it is hardly more than hinted at. Its beginning plainly appears in the words “Therefore thus will I do unto thee, O Israel” (verse 12), but with that it abruptly breaks off. What follows gives no hint of what the “thus” means; while verse 13, echoed in 5. 8 and 9. 6, deals with an entirely different idea.

Did the original conclusion correspond to 2. 14-16 and 3. 11? It surely seems, after the list of catastrophes given in 4. 6-11, that nothing remains but destruction. Was the end so horrible that some devout scribe, copying for his own use the words of the great prophet, felt that these words had better be omitted? Or did some accident of quite an ordinary kind happen to the early manuscript, blotting or tearing it so that the lines which seem needed here were lost? No one can say. Perhaps the passage is more terrifying with its conclusion left to the imagination. In any case it reënforces the principle set forth in 3. 3-6—that Jehovah is the one from whom these chastenings come.

The idea back of the words “Prepare to meet thy God” is not wholly clear. In their present position the words evidently mean that the time for repentance has passed, and that nothing but the final doom remains. But they are ambiguous. One can easily imagine circumstances under which “to meet thy God” would mean joy and not sorrow, delight rather than despair. God is not always



vindictive, and even sinners may be forgiven. In any case one is not justified in taking these words for any dogmatic purposes. Doctrines are not to be built upon texts of doubtful meaning.

#### ON A FEAST DAY

The brief words of 5. 1, 2 are highly characteristic. The word here translated "lamentation" means especially a lament for the dead, not simply a lament in general. Amos personifies the nation under the figure of the "virgin of Israel" and describes her as lying dead, forsaken, unburied. He is referring to the fate he sees awaiting the nation in the future, but he sees it so clearly that it seems to have happened already—the unburied corpse lies right there before him.

It would be interesting to know the circumstances under which Amos made such a pronouncement. His book is almost wholly silent on such matters. To the collectors of these words the circumstances and backgrounds were too familiar and, from their point of view, too unimportant for special record. They were far more interested in what the prophet said than in the circumstances under which he said it. These words, however, seem to imply a certain audience, as if Amos had uttered them on some public occasion when he could count on having a crowd to hear him. It might have been, as some have supposed, on the occasion of the harvest festival, when many would have come to "rejoice before Jehovah." Such times were times of relaxation and recreation, times of feasting and singing. One can imagine how someone would stir a group of feasters by reciting such words as:

"God give thee of the dew of heaven,  
And the fatness of the earth,  
And plenty of corn and wine:  
Let peoples serve thee,  
And nations bow down to thee" (Gen. 27. 28, 29).

To this all would respond with "Amen" and "The Lord hath fulfilled his word, Hallelujah!" Suddenly a sound is heard which all know only too well. It is the wailing

for the dead. It comes nearer. And then, to the amazement of all, it proves to be no funeral procession—only this grim prophet. His piercing eyes take them all in. What is he saying?

“The virgin of Israel is fallen—  
 She shall no more rise:  
 She is forsaken upon her land—  
 There is none to raise her” (Amos 5. 2).

What in the world does he mean? Then, as he sees the eyes of all fixed upon him, he continues with terrible earnestness:

“Hear this word which I take up against *you*, even a death-chant, O house of Israel:  
 Woe unto you that desire the day of the Lord!  
 What is the day of the Lord to *you*?  
 It is darkness and not light. . . .  
 Even very dark, and no brightness in it” (5. 1, 18, 20).

But he cannot hold them long. There is too much festivity in the air. Such an idea is ridiculous! Who can imagine disaster in the face of all this prosperity? And then someone says, just loud enough for a few to hear, “He’s crazy,” and the spell is broken! They begin to laugh, they call him names, they tell him to go back where he came from,—and then turn again to their feasting.)

If this did not all happen in just this way, it is nevertheless well within the bounds of possibility; and in principle this is what has happened over and over again when a careless, self-satisfied people has been confronted by an Amos, a Paul, a Savonarola, a John Wesley.

#### A DIFFICULT QUESTION

The particular message which appears in the passages grouped together for the lesson is one that reaches down deep into the very heart of faith. It seems almost a matter of instinct to regard a general catastrophe as an act of God. If we are caught in it, we call on God to save us. If it happens to others, we ask why God did it. It makes little difference what kind of disaster occurs; the first feeling

is the same. This is the feeling that underlies these words of Amos and that is, in a way, developed in the lesson.

He first states the general fact that when evil befalls a city, it is Jehovah's doing. Then he takes up in more detail certain evils that have actually happened—famine, drought, blasting and mildew, pestilence, defeat in war. Although we should regard some of these as natural events, Amos groups them all together as the voice of God calling the nation to repentance. Finally, in what he regards as the approaching death of the nation, brought to pass by enemy invasion, he sees only the act of God.

As we read these statements, they are so earnest and so clear that we cannot help saying to ourselves, "Of course; that is just the way it all happened, and exactly what it all meant." One can be deeply religious, however, and still have the question arise in his mind whether it was all as simple as these brief statements make it seem. We do not doubt that God was back of these events, *as he is back of all events*; but the meaning of these events, the purposes they were meant to serve, the divine motive that led to them, the idea that they were punishments—these are questions not to be answered so easily.

It must be borne in mind that Amos was not the only one of the sacred writers who dealt with this subject, and that Amos' view—namely, that disasters such as he described were national punishments—is not the only view represented in the Bible. In the Old Testament the whole great book of Job shows that calamities befall *the righteous*; in which case, naturally, they cannot be regarded as punishments. In the New Testament Jesus tells in words of undying beauty of the heavenly Father who "maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and the unjust" (Matt. 5. 45). He also, in one place, tells that such tragedies as being slain by Pilate or losing one's life because caught under a falling tower are not signs of any special sinfulness on the part of the victims (Luke 13. 1-5). While this does not necessarily mean that events of this kind are never punishments, it clearly shows that one cannot always be sure whether a certain disaster should be regarded as a punishment or not.

The fact of God's blessings is only another side of the same question. Few would be so bold as to say that they have personally deserved all the joys and comforts of life that have come to them. And if one's welfare cannot always be regarded as a reward of merit, neither can one's ill-fare always be regarded as a punishment of demerit.

It would seem, then, that one should not be too hasty in his conclusions regarding subjects upon which the Bible writers themselves hold different ideas. When taken in their proper order and considered in their proper relation to each other, it is seen that these different writers form a company of men through whom the divine revelation came as they were able to receive it. Each in turn had a vision of some aspect of the truth, true as far as it went, but not complete; and each in turn built upon the foundation laid by those who went before. Indeed, he not only built upon that foundation, but sometimes modified or remodeled the foundation itself. He advanced man's knowledge in some one direction, adding his own contribution to the sum of the whole. Aspects of the subject which he did not develop were taken up later by those who followed him, or they still await development.

#### TRUTH STILL TO BE REVEALED

To say that some of these subjects await development is saying that revelation concerning them is still to come; and this is in harmony with John 16. 12, 13, where it is plainly indicated that the followers of Jesus, then and thereafter, were the ones through whom later truth was to be received. This gives us our own true place in the great stream of religious life, of which the prophets, the apostles, and the church of later ages all form a vital part. It is not to be expected that every individual member of the church should become the channel of the fullest possible revelation. That is no more true to-day than it was in the days of Amos, of Paul, of Augustine, or of Luther. But it means that the God of truth still lives, that his children still need him, and that he is still leading them into ever-richer apprehensions of his love.

It is in this light that these words of Amos and, indeed,

Amos himself, are to be understood. He was one of that splendid company of prophets through whom "God, . . . at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers" (Heb. 1. 1). He appeared at a time when it was necessary to shake the national spirit out of its religious complacency and to rouse the people to new thoughts of God and new standards of life. He realized that the supreme need of the hour was to make the people see that their reliance on God would be in vain unless they met the obligations he laid on them. These divine obligations dealt with life in a much deeper way than the people had hitherto understood. Failure to meet them meant disaster. With a foreign foe on the horizon Amos felt that the disaster was at hand, and so his message was definite and imperative.

Looking back over the story, two impressive results appear. One is that thirty-five or forty years after Amos the whole northern kingdom actually fell a prey to the great empire of Assyria (B. C. 722). The other is that the lesson taught in these words of Amos—namely, that no nation can survive or expect God to preserve it which does not practice, throughout the whole body politic, the principles of justice and humanity—is a lesson not yet learned by the nations of the earth. It has been learned by small groups of people from time to time and by individuals here and there; but never yet by nations in a national way. It will only be learned as men who have found it out for themselves make it their business to teach others.

#### QUESTIONS TO DISCUSS

How can the hand of God in history be recognized?

How can one be ready to meet God?

What would Amos have said about this?

Does God have equal control of "natural" events and of "national" events?

How can the divine purposes be discovered?

What can we do toward averting the disaster which properly befalls national iniquity?

## CHAPTER IX

### PROPHETIC VISIONS

Amos 7. 1-9; 8. 1-3

#### WHAT DID AMOS SEE?

At first reading the present lesson seems to take us as far as possible from any sort of familiar experience. It brings us face to face with some of the experiences that seem to put a prophet away off in a place by himself. Now, while it is true that these prophets were men whose greatness towered far above the level of their time, and while it is true that the Scriptural language often tends to conceal rather than to reveal the true nature of the experience in question, many of those experiences are quite clear and convincing. They only need to be restated in a simple and more modern form.

Read carefully the brief but striking passages that make up the lesson. Note the four well-defined "visions" that "the Lord showed" Amos—the grasshoppers, the fiery drought, the plumb-line, and the basket of summer fruit. Note that these are things that Amos had doubtless seen more than once; the third and fourth, at least, he must have seen many times. This helps us to understand the general sense of the visions that Amos saw. So far as the objects themselves were concerned, everybody had probably seen them at one time or another. What they had not seen was the meaning which Amos gives them; so that what Amos really "saw" was some meaning or message that these natural objects might serve to illustrate. These natural objects and events might have suggested other meanings to other observers, but these are the meanings Amos saw.

Note that the first and second visions are alike in representing that the disaster which they threatened was not carried out. The third and fourth represent the disaster as carried to completion. So we have two pairs of visions,

each pair setting forth its own part of the message. Note that in the first pair the disaster is represented as sent from God, with no special reason stated as to why it was sent. In the second pair the disaster comes as a result of some inner weakness or defect of the people and is a logical result of the conditions that they have permitted to exist. Note also that in the first pair Amos protests against the severity of the approaching disaster. In the second pair he has nothing to say beyond answering the question "What seest thou?"

Note that nothing is said as to *how* "the Lord showed" Amos these things—whether in a dream of the night, whether in a trance, or whether in a time of meditation such as a prophet or any serious-minded person might devote to serious things. As soon as it is realized that the message is the thing, rather than any special way in which it is made known, it is clear that such "visions" as are here described could grow out of ideas that arose wholly within the mind of Amos, and which he puts in this Oriental, pictorial form. One need not suppose that Amos saw a kind of moving picture, with appropriate words interspersed. Amos is concerned with the will of God, and as a poet to-day might set forth a noble thought in the form of some visible event (compare Lowell's "The Vision of Sir Launfal"), so Amos, himself a poet in spirit, sets forth in the form of "visions" the thoughts and revelations that have come to him concerning himself and his people. The Hebrews used the word "show" as freely as we do, as, for instance, in the famous and searching words "He hath showed thee, O man, what is good" (Mic. 6. 8), where nothing definite in the way of time, place, or manner is involved.

It is important, further, to notice that the whole of each vision belongs to what "the Lord showed" Amos; including what Amos hears himself saying and what he hears the Lord reply. It has already been pointed out that the physical objects would be more or less familiar, apart from any special message they might suggest; so that what is really *meant* is that Amos found these natural objects suggesting or illustrating certain truths God had made known

to him. With those truths in mind he saw everything in a new light. Everything spoke to him of the message he felt called upon to proclaim. His heart was full of it, and it mattered not what he saw—a pest of grasshoppers, a drought, a plumb-line, or a basket of summer fruit—, each one offered some reminder or illustration. The *vision*, regarded as something which might be seen by human eyes, is less important than the *message*. The message is the picture; the vision is only the frame.

In brief, these clear-cut word pictures are vivid portrayals of Amos' own view of his message and of his relation to it. Their highly pictorial character must not divert the attention from the truth each was intended to convey. The Oriental used then, as the Oriental uses to this day, a manner of speech much more pictorial and fanciful than we of the West would dream of using. We leave that kind of thing to the poets, but the Orientals use it in ordinary conversation. Amos and his people were Orientals and had their own manner of speech. It is important for us to understand their manner as far as we are able in order to find beneath the surface of the Oriental language the essential message, the note of reality, the heart and life, which convince us of our kinship with this great soul of a distant past.

#### THE MESSAGE—PART I

On a first reading it might seem that these visions, like all the words of Amos so far considered, deal directly with the people and the future just ahead of them. This is true only in part. More careful study shows that what we have here is an even more important revelation of Amos' own thought, a leaf out of his own spiritual experience. It is all the more valuable because the book has so little on this profoundly interesting subject. In the books of Isaiah and Jeremiah accounts are given of the so-called "call" of each, in which the prophet definitely surrenders himself to the proclamation of whatever message God shall send him. The book of Amos has exactly one verse on this subject—namely, 7. 15—; and this verse has generally been regarded as the only reference to Amos' personal, inner



experience. In the verses that form our lesson, however, while we do not have an account of Amos' call we do have an insight into some of his spiritual experiences in relation to his prophetic work. It is in this light we shall study them. Their value in this connection has been too often overlooked.

Let us consider first the first pair of visions. It was shown above that the words of Amos and of the Lord, as given in the visions, were part of the visions. They represent what Amos heard himself saying and what he heard the Lord reply. Note that in each case (verses 2 and 5) the words of Amos represent his approach to God, and that the words of the Lord (verses 3 and 6) represent the Lord's response to this approach. It is because they faithfully represent the feeling toward God which Amos really had and the attitude he was sure God had toward him that he uses them in the visions he thus relates. They must have represented the feelings of Amos' own heart; otherwise, they would never have been repeated and preserved. Interesting as they are for the particular petitions they utter, they are more interesting and more valuable as evidences of Amos' feeling of a perfectly free access to God and of his conviction that God would immediately respond to his appeals.

Where are we to suppose this all took place? The answer is right at hand. It took place where all such transactions take place—in the heart of the seeker after God. Words are not necessary in order *to have the experience*, although there can be no doubt that Amos prayed often and earnestly for his people. Words are necessary only when we come *to describe the experience to others*. Not any particular words that God may use, but the conviction in my heart that he has received me and answered me is the essential factor in my experience. And as it is with the believer to-day, so it was then, and so it was with Amos. It had been so with Elijah, who found God, not in the wind or the earthquake or the fire but in the still small voice. So Amos, in these simple words, has opened the door of his heart, and for a moment we may see him face to face with his God.

No idle curiosity can excuse our presence here. The place is holy, and we must come with deepest reverence. At the moment when, as it seems to Amos, God is about to pour out his punishment upon a rebellious people, Amos dares to reason with him and dares to bid him stay his hand. It makes us think of the parable Jesus told about the gardener who pleaded for the barren fig tree (Luke 13. 6-9). For a moment Amos seems kinder and more forbearing than God himself, and God becomes willing to consent to Amos' appeal—at least, so it seems to Amos at the moment.

The boldness of Amos in this appeal was due to his understanding of his people, his sympathy with them, and his love for them. He has often been regarded as harsh and stern. And this is true of much that finds a place in his book. But these two visions alone are enough to show that, however stern he might be, he was never unsympathetic; however harsh, he was never bitter. It is his love for his people that sends him to God in this daring fashion. He never would have gone on his own account, but for his people he does not hesitate. He knows them as weak, erring, and insignificant ("small," verses 2, 5). He knows that they can never survive such punishments as God might visit upon them.

And the punishments are withheld! Knowing the people as he does, Amos realizes that they have no idea that punishment is at hand, and naturally there would be no one to call upon God to delay his visitations. So Amos somehow feels the burden of his people's danger upon his own shoulders. He will plead their cause even if he be the only one to do it. Abraham asked God to spare Sodom in case there should be found *ten righteous* persons there (Gen. 18. 22-33). Amos, who feels himself, like Elijah (1 Kings 19. 14), the only surviving faithful one, dares to ask that the nation be spared even if they are *all sinners*. It was a daring proposal, and we can almost imagine the awe with which Amos made it and the deeper awe that came to him as the conviction deepened in his soul that these disasters really had been delayed. God had heard him! But further experiences awaited him.

## THE MESSAGE—PART II

The third and fourth visions quickly show themselves as a kind of second chapter to the first pair; and as they proceed to correct the conclusions Amos might have reached on the basis of the first two visions, they also correct the ideas which many people to-day hold regarding the power of a prophet's prayer.

Note that in these visions the Lord is the first speaker, instead of Amos, as in the first pair. Note that in each case the object Amos sees is of a kind that carries certain qualities and conclusions with it. Note that the plumb-line gives a standard of what might be called "vertical truth." It cannot be diverted nor deceived; it is simply "there." If held alongside a wall, no word is necessary. The wall is plumb or it is not. In the presence of the plumb-line it shows its own approval or condemnation. Nothing further need be said. If the Lord sets a certain standard before the people, the people meet that standard or they do not. When the time has come for the test, all the prayers in the world cannot change the fact.

The basket of summer fruit which Amos sees in the fourth vision is equally plain and convincing. The summer fruit has reached its highest point of growth and glory, and from the moment it is gathered it starts toward decay. This is in the nature of the case. Fruit is the sort of thing that has this quality. After it is ripened and gathered, all the prayers in the world cannot delay the approaching dissolution. It has lived out its day, its time is up; and no matter how keen one's affection for it, it cannot be kept in its present state, its end is at hand. Amos knew all this as well as anybody.

Taking these two visions together, they present another side of the situation of which the first visions showed but one. Viewed as reflections of Amos' spiritual experience, that experience is seen to be somewhat as follows: Amos was a lover and champion of his people. In his devotion to them he did not hesitate to appeal to God himself in their defense. As a prophet he felt no restraint in the divine presence; indeed, he was confident, at first, that

not only could he appeal to God, but that his appeal must be—was—granted. This is not all, however: the Spirit of God was leading him to see another factor in the case. He is shown that there were qualities and conditions in the people themselves which *no prayer but their own* could change. No other person praying for them, no prophet, not even Amos, with all his first assurance, could avert by prayer a consequence which the nature of the case compelled.

This is why, in the second pair of visions, Amos has no answer. He sees that God is not the only factor. The people themselves make God's patience unavailing. The Lord shows him the plumb-line and the summer fruit, and Amos knows that no appeal of his and no willingness on the Lord's part to hear and to grant that appeal can give straightness to the leaning wall or life to the dying fruit. Amos was not so much stern as sad. It would sober any man to face such facts as these.

It is one of the tragedies of life that there are limitations to the power of love. There are standards independent of men and (we say it reverently) of God. There are conditions that carry inevitable results in their train. No matter how tenderly and devotedly a mother may love her child, if that child does certain things, the mother is simply helpless. All the love in the world cannot avert the consequences. If, however, the child himself attempts his own amendment, the first step toward salvation has been taken. The other step is that taken by the heavenly Father, who always comes more than half way to meet a returning child.

This is the great truth that Amos learned in these "visions." He left no stone unturned to arouse the people to take that first step, for he realized now that without that step on their own behalf no prayers of his could save them. He was convinced that the divine standards of life and action must be met. That is what God stood for, and that is what Amos himself stood for. If the people persisted in their failure to meet these standards, the people themselves had put their case beyond remedy.

We who live in the later day of the revelation of God's

love in Christ know that Christ himself acknowledged the same conditions; but we know also, in the words of the great apostle, that while "the wages of sin is death," "the gift of God is eternal life in Jesus Christ our Lord" (Rom. 6. 23). But even that gift is helpless until it be sought by the one who needs it.

#### QUESTIONS TO DISCUSS

If these visions of Amos are more concerned with ideas than with physical objects, might not similar visions be received to-day?

Has the second vision any bearing on the question of praying for rain?

Can prayer prevail with God unless the Spirit of God prevail in the life of the one who prays?

Was Amos any less answered in the third and fourth visions than in the first and second?

Can you think of any means Amos failed to use by which the people could have been stirred to undertake their own amendment?

## CHAPTER X

### THE JUDGMENT—ACCORDING TO AMOS

Amos 8. 4-14; 9. 1-10

#### THE DAY OF THE LORD

WHEN it was said in a previous lesson that Amos was the first to proclaim certain teachings, it was not meant that every word of his book dealt with ideas never heard before. There were some beliefs held by the Hebrews long before Amos appeared which in all probability Amos himself shared at first but which, in the light of later revelations, Amos was compelled to correct or to deny. One of these concerned "the day of Jehovah" (King James Version: day of the LORD, or more briefly, "that day"). Like some of the other ideas already discussed, this seems at first to be far removed from modern ways of thinking. But the principle underlying this term is one of the most persistent in the whole field of religion, and in some form or other it finds expression in every age.

The several references to this "day" in Amos indicate that it was a commonplace of current religious thought. It went back to a time earlier than any written prophecy. Indeed, there seem to be grounds for supposing that in Egypt, a thousand or more years before Amos, there were religious teachers who dealt with similar ideas.<sup>1</sup> Coming down to the present time, we find many forms of belief which, in principle, are only this ancient "day of the LORD" brought down to date.

Briefly stated, the idea of "the day" was that Jehovah should deliver his people from their enemies and thus usher in a time of happiness, of prosperity, and of peace. At different periods of the nation's history the deliverance of the people and the overthrow of the enemy were differently understood. At first it probably meant a victory in

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<sup>1</sup>Compare *Archæology and the Bible*, Barton, Chapter XXIV.

some particular battle. No question was raised about the righteousness of the nation's cause; it was taken for granted that Jehovah and Israel were on the same side, and that they belonged together. When Israel was threatened by an enemy, no one supposed that Jehovah would ask, "Is my nation righteous and does she deserve victory?"

For this reason "the day" had long been regarded as a day of triumph. Indeed, there had been many such "days" when Israel had been victorious and Jehovah had been exalted. There could be no better illustration of this whole circle of thought than Exod. 15. 1-18. This stirring poem expresses admirably the point of view of the Hebrews in Amos' day who "desired the day of the *Lord*." The same idea, in almost the same words, appears to-day in our feeling that God is on the side of our nation when any war is on; and that our victory is a victory for righteousness—that is, for God.

Amos regards the whole matter in a different light. He holds that God is more concerned to have the nation righteous than to have it victorious. If it is unrighteous, it shall be defeated, and it deserves to be. Perhaps a few might escape (3. 12), but the majority—practically the whole nation—would go down to doom. This violently reversed the whole popular idea of the day. It became now a day of judgment rather than a day of victory.

It is not surprising that Amos took such an extreme view. His conception of the righteous character of God would lead him to a very dark view of the unrighteousness of the nation, and his zeal for Jehovah would not make him lenient toward sinners. It often happens that revealers of new ideas run to extremes. It needs an extremist to compel the attention of an indifferent public. At this distance it is possible to look back and see how powerfully Amos set forth his unwelcome message and to see also how later prophets modified some of his extreme positions.

One idea at least he established in a way never to be forgotten—namely, that a day would come when God would reckon with his people on the basis of sin and righteousness. This idea has gone through many forms and has

had an interesting history. We have already seen that Amos presented it in an extreme form. Isaiah, who followed Amos, reasserted the principle of judgment but held that a larger portion of the nation would survive this judgment. It would still be a small portion (remnant), but not as small as Amos had supposed.

As the centuries passed, and changing conditions led to new and different thoughts on religious subjects, the Jews found themselves a very small nation, exploited and oppressed by great world empires—Persia, Greece, Rome. Under these influences, aggravated by their sufferings, they came more and more to regard themselves as a righteous nation oppressed by a sinful world. The distinctions Amos had set up were in large measure ignored, and the nation thought of itself as a whole once more and as the special object of Jehovah's uncritical care.

The judgment-day idea consequently took on a new form—namely, the overthrow and punishment of the great non-Jewish empires, which constituted practically the whole political world so far as the Jews were concerned, and the triumph and exaltation of the Jewish nation, which, through God's miraculous act, would now be raised to glory. Note that the sin that Amos had found in the nation itself is now transferred to "the world" as contrasted with the Jews.

This later form of the idea, involving a relatively small group of righteous persons, raised by divine intervention to victory over a sinful world, had its influence on the form taken by the later Christian idea of a Judgment Day. It must be remembered that the early Christians were Jews before they were Christians, and that they naturally carried over much of their native Judaism into their newly acquired Christianity. Before the close of the first century they had undergone more than one persecution that would tend to revive their earlier Jewish ideas of a day when God would vindicate his little group of faithful ones and punish their oppressors.

While we to-day can see how these Jewish ideas were carried over into Christianity, the early Christians themselves would not be conscious of what they were doing.



Being Jews, they naturally held fast the hopes which colored so much of the Jewish thought of that time. When they became Christians, it would not occur to them that they should leave behind them some of the most cheering and encouraging elements of their Jewish faith. So they bring these ideas with them and, *so far as this subject is concerned*, Christianity becomes a kind of revised version of Judaism. It is highly probable that some of the ideas about the Judgment held by many Christians to-day are really more Jewish than Christian.

A detail that is not without interest in this connection is the way a significant word has been used in two meanings. In Amos—and the Old Testament generally—the word “LORD” is used for Jehovah, the God of Israel, and “the day of the LORD” meant the day of God, of Jehovah. In the New Testament the word “Lord” is used of Christ. So the early Christians could read from the Old Testament references to the day of the LORD (Jehovah) and apply them to a day of the LORD (Christ), with which originally they had nothing to do. This coincidence of the word aided the transfer of the Jewish ideas into the Christian religion.

#### THE EARTH TREMBLED

In 8. 8, 9 and 9. 5 the prophet represents the earth itself as in some way and in some measure sharing in the judgment that is to be visited on the nation. If such references occurred here only they might be dismissed without serious consideration; but such expressions appear so frequently that they raise the question, How did the prophets think of the world in its relation to the great messages they had to proclaim? What is the significance of such statements as “the land shall tremble for this” (8. 8) and “I will cause the sun to go down at noon” (8. 9) and “the land shall melt” (9. 5)? In the first place it is quite clear that Amos is not thinking of what people to-day mean by the end of the world. He is referring to the punishments that shall come upon the people and he evidently regards these punishments as near at hand.

The prophets, as a rule, do not seem to anticipate a de-

struction of the world. They expect punishments that they describe in terms of natural events, but the blessed time that was expected to follow these punishments was always regarded as taking place upon the earth. In order to be a suitable place for the purified nation which survived the punishments, the earth itself was renovated and renewed. It is in this sense that we read of "new heavens and a new earth" (Isa. 65. 17), in which the same natural conditions appear which belong to the present earth.

Similar expressions are used for less extensive events, as in Amos 1. 2. Often heaven and earth are called upon as though they might act as witnesses of the charges brought against a rebellious people, as in Isa. 1. 2. Winds and lightnings act as messengers for divine errands (Psa. 104. 3, 4). It is thus evident that references to nature such as are found in the present lesson are not to be separated from these other ones, which are of a milder character. They all belong together and are parts of that view of nature characteristic of the Hebrews generally and of the prophets in particular.

The Hebrews generally shared with the rest of the world at that time an idea of nature very different from that held to-day. When it is considered how recently men have learned about gravitation, the shape of the earth, eclipses, earthquakes, light, and electricity, it is no wonder that in ancient times men ignorant of these things regarded the earth as almost a living thing, whose actions were directed not by certain "natural laws" but by feelings of the earth itself, as it responded to acts of God, of man, or of spirits (compare Isa. 1. 2; Jer. 2. 13; Isa. 49. 1; Psa. 65. 11-13; 77. 16; 96. 11; 98. 8). To understand such expressions as these and to sympathize with them it is quite necessary to think of the world as these old Hebrews thought of it. For them such words involved no conflict with their ideas of nature and of the world. They must not be tested by modern scientific discoveries, but must be taken in the spirit in which they were meant.

The prophets were not only Hebrews, sharing these views of life and of the world; they were also poets. To the

natural imagery of the Oriental mind they added the freedom and originality of thought which led them to use familiar facts and theories as poets in all ages have done. In their prophetic discourses they go further than the average man in representing nature as influenced by the acts of God and man. When they say that "the top of Carmel shall wither," that "the sun will go down at noon," that "the land shall melt," and many other such things, they cannot be regarded as making scientific statements. They are speaking as Hebrews and as poets, and their references to nature have the same exalted fervor as their impassioned words on other subjects—for example, Amos 2. 10; 3. 9, 10, 12; 5. 1, 2, 6; 6. 12, 13. They are neither geologists nor astronomers but religious teachers, who utter their messages in terms that their hearers would recognize at once as appropriate to the profoundly serious character of the message itself.

#### THE WORD OF THE LORD

Among the punishments that Amos announces is "a famine of the words of the LORD," when men shall "run to and fro to seek the word of the LORD and shall not find it" (8. 11, 12). Amos is right in indicating this as a serious fate. We are so accustomed to the idea that the Bible is the Word of God, and that in it we can find the word of the Lord whenever we desire it, that at first we do not realize that Amos was not speaking of any collection of the words of God which had been uttered to other people on other occasions in an earlier time; he meant what the Hebrews called "the living word"—a spoken word from some teacher or prophet, through whom God sent the needed word at a needy time. He saw no comfort in the idea that the people might have consulted the words that God had anciently uttered through Moses or Samuel or David or Elijah. He realized their immediate and constant need of living leaders who could direct the people according to the divine will.

The idea that the words of the Lord, or the Word of God, could all be contained in a single writing or a collection of writings such as our Bible would have caused

the prophets great surprise. Nobody would have dreamed of such a thing at that time. "The word of God" was their term for *God's will in action*. It was this word that inspired the prophets, it was this that created the world (Gen. 1), it was this that accomplished the divine purposes among men (Isa. 55. 11), that melted the hard heart and broke the stubborn will (Jer. 23. 29), that sought out men's inner motives (Heb. 4. 12), that brought to spiritual birth the first Christian fellowship (1 Pet. 1. 23). It is unfortunate that this large, rich, true, and Scriptural conception of God's immediate and unfailing resources of leadership should ever have given way to reliance upon a collection of past words that, precious as they are beyond all measure, cannot be and were never intended to be a substitute for "the living word." As the divine leadership of the Hebrews in the wilderness could not serve for the guidance of David in his kingdom; as the divine direction of David and his kingdom could not serve to guide the returned exiles when they undertook to reestablish their homes and their worship; as the divine counsel that aided the returned exiles could not adequately direct the life of the growing Christian church: so it is now and ever shall be that the supreme need of all who would worthily live for God is to find him and hear him *at first hand*. The prophet Jeremiah voiced this in undying words, but they are not yet understood (Jer. 31. 34).

It is as necessary to-day that men find the word of the Lord as in the days of Amos. We have advantages that Amos and his people did not have. We have the examples and the testimonies of "the goodly fellowship of the prophets, the glorious company of the apostles, and the noble army of martyrs." Above all we have the life and teachings of Jesus. These are our guides, tried and trustworthy, leading us toward the goal discerned so long ago by Amos and Jeremiah, where God

". . . stooped to heal  
 My soul, as if in a thunder peal  
 Where one heard noise and one saw flame,  
 I only knew he named my name."

## QUESTIONS TO DISCUSS

Is a Day of Judgment to be feared or welcomed? (Compare Psa. 96. 11-13.)

Is it necessary that all be judged on the same "day"?

In view of the changes through which the idea has passed, can we be sure that the last word has been spoken on the subject?

To what extent is the future of our earth revealed in the poetic language of the prophets?

Does spiritual and ethical righteousness depend on the destruction of the earth?

If such an event should occur, would the survivors be any more righteous afterward than before?

Is righteousness a condition of body or of spirit?

Does the "word of God" or the "word of the Lord" in the Bible refer chiefly to spoken or written words?

Where is the word of God to be looked for?

Is any light thrown on this subject by the fact that those through whom the word of God came, always presented it as something new in their own day, and made so little reference to any words spoken previously?

## CHAPTER XI

### THE BLESSED FUTURE

Amos 9. 11-15

#### THE HAPPY ENDING

AFTER the storm a calm! The stormy little book of Amos, with its wars and famines, its pestilences and earthquakes, comes to a most surprising close in a picture of peace and quiet, of homes and happiness. The stormy spirit comes to anchor in a haven of rest.

As one reads the books of the prophets one cannot escape the feeling that they were more or less pessimistic in their outlook. So much of what they said consists of criticism and condemnation that the first impression is one of darkness and gloom. Further reading, however, shows that after a certain amount of warning and rebuke, a contrast is introduced by a passage that gives a brighter message,—a ray of light is permitted to relieve the darkness. The present lesson is a passage of this character.

Before taking it up in detail let us ask why there should be any happy ending at all. Why should not the nation go down to a gloomy destruction if it is really as sinful as the prophets say? Does it not fully deserve such a fate? If there were nothing to be considered but sin and punishment, one should have to answer that punishment was unavoidable, no matter how severe, whether it would destroy the nation or not.

Yet the problem never seems to work out just that way. Sin itself cannot be dealt with as an abstract proposition. It cannot be separated from the sinner himself. The sinner is a human being whom God loves. God loved—*loves*—the world, and he is more concerned for humanity than for theology.<sup>1</sup> And while earnest souls have been labor-

<sup>1</sup> Compare "The sabbath was made for man, and not man for the sabbath" (Mark 2. 27).

iously working out elaborate theories of sin and punishment, the human sinner, whom they had quite forgotten, has come to himself and said, "I will arise and go to my Father"; and, like the mists before the morning sun, the elaborate schemes have evaporated before the love that casts out fear. So, somehow or other, these universal dooms never quite happen.

It is a curious and interesting fact that this very race of Hebrews, and especially its prophets, who have given us the most gloomy forebodings of terrible futures, are also the ones who seem to have felt most deeply and to have set forth most glowingly the hopes and promises that most effectively discount the terrors the prophets predict. The chorus of despair grows faint, and a new song is heard: "O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?"

This no denial of the principle that "whatsoever a man soweth that shall he also reap." But no one is ever limited to a single sowing, and earlier crops can often be crowded out by later plantings. Where *life* is concerned, no one can tell at any particular time what possibilities lie just ahead.

Some instinct of this kind seems to have been rooted deep in the prophetic consciousness. Despite their words of warning and of punishment they were never quite convinced that Jehovah's work for righteousness would end in dismal failure. Out of this profound assurance arises the oft-noted fact that while many ancient peoples looked back to a distant past as the time when they had their golden age, the Hebrews looked forward to a time in the future when

"All we have willed or hoped or dreamed of good shall exist."

Their golden age was yet to come. In spite of failures and in spite of fears, though some, or even many, individuals might seem to go the way of destruction, they were sure

"... that somehow good  
Will be the final goal of ill."

In the long last there would be a happy ending. And we feel that they were right. Their faith is also ours.

“Unto the upright there ariseth  
Light in the darkness.”

### WHO DREW THIS PICTURE?

Men's ideas about the blessed future have differed as widely as their ideas about the judgment. They agree in the fact that there shall be such a time; but just when or where it shall be, or just what form it will take when it arrives are questions to which very different answers have been given. The passage before us shows a twofold interest—agricultural and national.

According to the first idea the blessed future will be a kind of husbandman's paradise, characterized by a fertility rich beyond compare. Such a picture is quite as interesting for what it reveals about the one who drew it as for what it actually portrays. Such a future would make but little appeal to a merchant or a soldier or a mechanic or a statesman. It is evidently designed for a particular class of persons.

It confirms what was said in a previous lesson about the prophets expecting the blessed future to take place on earth. Even if these words were regarded as poetical in their fervor, their reference is nevertheless to the earth on which we now live. The words are not figurative nor symbolical so far as this point is concerned. They are, indeed, highly colored, but they are direct and straightforward and speak quite frankly of a kind of paradise that would be heaven to a man whose life and whose delight were to plow, to plant, and to reap.

Such a future, however, could hardly have satisfied Amos. If the rest of the book truly represents his feeling—and there is no reason for doubt about it—, this kind of future was far removed from his ideals. True, he was an out-of-doors man and to that extent would feel a certain sympathy with the picture. But it lacks elements the rest of his book regards as essential. Nothing is said of justice to the poor, square dealing by merchants, nor true worship.



It is barely possible that, after all, Amos might have felt that a return to a primitive, agricultural simplicity of life would be the best way to overcome the evils he so vigorously denounced. Instead of thinking that city life, with its commerce, its luxury, and its refinements of civilization, could be purified, perhaps he regarded it as hopeless and felt that the only cure for its evils would be to abolish it altogether and let everybody get back to the land. In view, also, of the high ethical spirit represented in the rest of the book, it is difficult to suppose that Amos looked forward to a future as materialistic and as self-centered as this—a life whose chief attraction seems to be the prospect of laborless crops.

According to the second idea the nation is to be restored from captivity and is to be reëstablished in perpetual security. The tabernacle of David, which has been overthrown, is to be restored. This tabernacle (literally, booth, or hut) seems to mean the Davidic dynasty, which, as we know, ceased with the Exile. This situation would involve a most un-Amos-like exaltation of the nation.

A further characteristic of the rest of the book is the way Amos ignores the idea of patriotism. He seems to be quite unimpressed by it, even to the extent of regarding with a certain complacency his nation's downfall. He shows as much concern, in some respects, for nations that were enemies of Israel as for Israel itself. The passage before us looks toward a national reëstablishment with considerable enthusiasm. Strange to say, it is not the restoration of the nation to which Amos preached, but of a nation under the dynasty of David. The northern kingdom, where Amos seems to have done all his preaching, had revolted from the sway of the Davidic line two centuries before Amos comes on the scene; and there would be nothing attractive to the people of the northern kingdom in any promise involving the surrender of their own independence and a future submission to some descendant of David.

It is somewhat surprising to note in this passage—if, indeed, it be from Amos at all—the absence of any reason given for the nation's return. Amos does not condemn

the people without giving reasons in great variety for his condemnations; and it is hard to understand how he could promise a blessed future without indicating some repentance on their part or some change in their attitude which would justify this very different outlook.

The more carefully the passage is considered, the more ground there seems to be for the idea, held by many Bible students, that this passage has been added to the book by some writer who lived when the line of David had been definitely cut off, when the people were in captivity, and when the hope of a return to Palestine was springing up in the hearts of faithful exiles. There would be nothing strange about this. We know that just as the book of the Psalms grew gradually by the addition of new Psalms to earlier small collections; and just as the Old Testament itself grew from time to time as successive books were written, in a similar way many of the books of the prophets, while bearing the names of those whose words make up the greater part of the books, were expanded by later prophets who continued and applied the teachings of the first.

So when the question is asked, "Who drew this picture?" the answer would be, "Someone far more deeply concerned with the future than Amos ever shows himself to have been." And if it was someone other than Amos, it was probably a writer who lived during the captivity the passage refers to.

#### OTHER VIEWS—AND OURS

The present lesson should be compared with other passages bearing on this subject. Read Isa. 30. 26, where it is said that the moon shall be as bright as the sun, and the sun seven times as bright as it is now. Read Isa. 65. 17-25, where the "new heavens and the new earth" are simply a kind of *edition de luxe* of the present earth, with Jerusalem, Mount Zion, as the place chiefly concerned. In this new earth we see home-building, vineyard-planting, children and aged people, with happiness and peace everywhere, even among the animals.

While not all the pictures of the blessed future are as

materialistic as these, if several of them are read one right after the other, one cannot fail to be impressed with the preponderance of earthly traits in all. As it becomes clear, however, that these highly colored descriptions spring from the poetic freedom of prophetic speech, one recognizes these passages as expressing the hopes and aspirations of those who were sure of the ultimate security and happiness of the faithful. They are not charts of the future nor revelations of the celestial calendars; they are something far more significant: they are joyful utterances of a trust in God that no disaster could disappoint.

Many of the ideas thus set forth were taken over into Christianity, just as the ideas of the Judgment were taken; and many Christians do not yet distinguish between those elements that are Jewish and those that are Christian. In view of the numerous, varied, and sometimes conflicting descriptions of the future which appear in the Bible it is no wonder that even to-day there is no general agreement as to the character of the future life. Many are trying to discover its nature through supposed communications with those on the other side. Yet these not only differ widely from each other, but their "revelations" exhibit the same earthly and physical traits as those of the ancient Hebrew seers.

We, as Christians, are on safest and surest ground when we rest back on the indications that come to us from Jesus Christ. While he used the pictorial, prophetic method in some of his teachings on this subject, he stands apart from all others in the way he regards the future as determined by spiritual and ethical principles, even where he is most poetic and concrete. He lays no special emphasis upon what might be called the external conditions of the future life, but he lays unflinching and overpowering emphasis on those qualities of heart and mind, of thought and will, which make a man what he really is. He shows clearly that the conditions which make for future happiness are spiritual conditions, and that these are operative here and now. The qualities that make for true happiness there make for true happiness here, and *vice versa*.

This is the deeper meaning of the Beatitudes. They

have that timeless quality which appears in so much—indeed, in practically all—of Jesus' teachings. In these familiar and matchless words Jesus is giving utterance to his thought of life's true character, there as well as here. For Jesus there was no hard-and-fast boundary between present and future; he lived in a pure present. And when he spoke of those qualities of spirit which "bless" a man he was speaking and thinking of qualities that belong to eternity. He who possesses them here possesses them forever. They can neither be corrupted nor stolen; they are eternal possessions. And just because they endure from present to future, he who has found them now has in himself the strongest assurance that the blessed future will be his.

"Strive, man, to win that glory;  
Toil, man, to gain that light;  
Send hope before to grasp it,  
Till hope be lost in sight."

#### QUESTIONS TO DISCUSS

To what extent is one's idea of future happiness influenced by his idea of present happiness?

Would the prophets be subject to this kind of influence? Would they be any the less spokesmen for God if they were?

Turning the question around, is it not true that one's idea of a blessed future is an accurate indication of what he most enjoys and most desires?

Would a farmer's paradise necessarily be a merchant's paradise? or a scholar's?

Are the Jewish beliefs that were taken over into Christianity by the first Christians a necessary part of Christianity?

Did Jesus and Paul accept Judaism as a whole? Did they cover the whole subject in the matter of acceptance or rejection?

Should not Christians to-day be permitted to exercise discrimination in such a matter?

## CHAPTER XII

### PROPHETS AND THE CHURCH

Amos 7. 10-17

#### AS OTHERS SAW HIM

THIS passage is different from all the rest of the book (except 1. 1) in being a story about Amos rather than a report of his words. It probably serves, by this very difference, to indicate the true character of the book. The words in verses 14-17 needed some kind of explanation if they were to be understood, and so the description in verses 10-13 is supplied by whomever made this collection of Amos' words. The whole book may indeed have been brought together by the writer of this brief bit of description. He evidently felt the dramatic intensity of the situation he here describes. We should have been grateful if he had given us much more description of this kind. Many of these words of Amos are so striking just as they stand that they would be even more vivid if we knew the circumstances under which they were spoken.

This is the only place in the book which gives us the slightest hint of the impression Amos made upon those who heard him. No one can read his glowing words without wondering how they were received. Did they make the people angry? Or did the people listen in a patronizing way and say, "Poor man, he means well; but that sort of talk will never get him anywhere"? Probably most of the people were on the side of Amaziah and the king.

The absence of any report of the way the people felt toward Amos makes it extremely difficult to estimate the importance he had in his own day. The fact that his little book is now in the Bible gives us the idea that he was a great man, and he was. But there is no evidence that he was regarded as a great man from the first. There is

no evidence that any of the prophets whom we know as "great" were ever received with approval by the people at large. They were always in a small and unpopular minority.

It should not be overlooked, however, that opposition is no proof that a man is a prophet. A man may be highly unpopular and a general nuisance, and not be a prophet on that account. One does not become a prophet simply by arousing the antagonism of his neighbors. The martyr pose is not always evidence of the martyr spirit. To be a prophet he must make a positive contribution to the spiritual life of the people, must lack any impulse to self-seeking, and must be far removed from petty politics. There is a largeness of word and purpose about all the true prophets which lifts them above the levels of life and thought upon which most of us live, move, and have our being.

#### AMOS OF THE FREE SPIRIT

As Elijah had confronted Ahab in Samaria a hundred years before this time, as Paul was to confront Peter at Antioch eight hundred years later, so Amos the prophet confronts Amaziah the priest at Bethel. Two types of religion, represented in two typical personalities, here stand face to face.

Amos stands for God's immediate access to the human soul. He represents no institution, whether religious or national. He regards neither king nor priest, palace nor temple. He barely alludes to the past, and then only to a past so far distant that it serves to contradict all that an Amaziah would regard as firmly established. He cares nothing for orderly methods nor for courtly ceremonies. He stands for one thing, and one thing only: that is the living voice of the living God in the living present. He embodies that picture of the prophet sketched later in such bold strokes by Jeremiah:

"He that hath my word,  
Let him speak my word faithfully.  
Is not my word like a fire,

And like a hammer that shatters the rock?"

(Jer. 23. 28, 29).

The word "prophet" is subject to some misunderstanding in this passage. We have formed our idea of prophets on monumental characters such as Amos, Isaiah, and Jeremiah without realizing that these men were quite exceptional. Aside from the fact that they sought the will of God without reference to priest or sacrifice they had little in common with the better-known and more numerous "sons of the prophets," who represented the more professional side of prophecy. These latter seem to have been quite as conventional and quite as professional in their own way as the priests were in theirs. The great prophets were of a different order.

Amos uses the word in this double sense in verses 14, 15. He first denies being a (professional) prophet or a member of the prophetic guild (sons of the prophets) and then proceeds immediately to say that the Lord had told him to prophesy. Amos' own idea of prophets and prophecy appears in words which may have been uttered on an occasion similar to this one:

"Surely the Lord Jehovah will do nothing,  
 But he revealeth his secret  
 Unto his servants the prophets.  
 The lion hath roared: who will not fear?  
 The Lord Jehovah hath spoken: who can but prophesy?"  
 (Amos 3. 7, 8).

One cannot help feeling that these words are a quick and stinging rebuke to some who had been telling Amos that he was not a real prophet, and that he did not have "the word of the Lord." They supply another indication that prophets of the Amos type were neither familiar nor popular. It is as much of a mistake to suppose that all the men called prophets by the Hebrews were like Amos or Isaiah as to suppose that all preachers in our own day are like Henry Ward Beecher or Phillips Brooks.

#### AMAZIAH THE PRUDENT AND PROSPEROUS

Amaziah forms a contrast to Amos in almost every respect. He stands for the religion handed down from the fathers, for the institutions that had grown out of and

around that religion, for precedent and propriety. He also stands for patriotism and is a champion of the king as well as of the temple. He thinks it outrageous that Amos should threaten the nation with captivity and disaster. Such language, according to Amaziah, is treasonable and seditious. He thinks Amos should be deported. Amos belonged in the south: why didn't he stay there? Bethel had no room for troublesome intruders. If Amos didn't like the way things were going in Israel, let him go back where he came from. Furthermore, Amos is not only an outsider but a clumsy farmer as well. He doesn't know how to behave himself in a royal sanctuary!

We can almost hear Amaziah's ringing tones, vibrant with righteous indignation in a holy cause, when he says to Amos: "O thou seer, go, flee away into the land of Judah, and there eat bread, and prophesy there; but prophesy not again any more at Bethel, for it is the king's shrine and a royal temple."

It is quite in keeping with his character, as indicated in this brief dialogue, that he should have this "businesslike" view of priesthood and prophecy. He is a man who knows no inner imperative apart from the profitable and respectable demands of his profession. He is not necessarily bad nor narrow nor reactionary. Indeed, he may have been a very good man up to his lights. He simply had no understanding of the prophetic spirit which spoke in Amos, so he took it for granted that Amos, like himself, regarded his work as a means of comfortable support.

Such people—and they are many—cannot understand how other people can follow a calling or pursue a line of action that brings no financial return. The idea is simply unintelligible that some souls can be lit with an inner flame, led by a wondrous star, and live obedient to a heavenly vision, taking no account of loaves and fishes—souls that cannot live by bread alone, to whom hardship and poverty are the least of their troubles, who, in the words of the apostle, "approve themselves as ministers of God in much patience, in afflictions, in necessities, in distresses, . . . as dying and, behold they live, as chastened and not killed, as sorrowful yet always rejoicing, as



poor yet making many rich, as having nothing and yet possessing all things" (2 Cor. 6. 4-10).

Experiences of this kind lie beyond the reach not only of wicked people but of many good people too. They were beyond the reach of Amaziah. At first one feels a little sorry for him, that with his high position and its corresponding opportunities he should seem so mean and ineffective alongside this vigorous and unconventional shepherd-preacher. It is only because of our detachment from the whole situation, however, that we can regard Amaziah in this light. Centuries of history have reversed the original relations of Amaziah and Amos. In the days when both were living Amaziah was the lofty one and Amos the lowly. Amaziah had every advantage—an assured position, the reverence of the people, the favor of the king. He stood on the side of respectability and orthodoxy. He represented the elements that controlled the national life, from the king down.

If we had been there probably we should have supported Amaziah rather than Amos. This assertion is made on the assumption that in matters of this kind people are much the same in all ages. They would far rather be led than be forced to seek out new paths for themselves. When it comes to religion, independence seems as dangerous as it is difficult. And who should be more acceptable as leaders than those who are already prominent, who already enjoy the general confidence, who have the support of the ruling classes, and who represent the old-time religion? Amaziah is not to be lightly pitied nor dismissed. He personifies the "general opinion" of his day and of all days.

#### "EITHER—OR" VERSUS "BOTH—AND"

When two such highly characteristic and divergent ideals as those embodied in Amos and Amaziah confront each other, our first impression is that one of them is wholly good and the other wholly bad. We feel that we must approve one and condemn the other. This feeling is intensified in this particular instance because of the place the book of Amos holds in the Bible. The mere fact of its presence there is enough to assure us that Amos must have

been right, and that all who opposed him or whom he condemned must have been wrong.

The contents of the book further confirm this idea. Not only is Amos presented as warning, rebuking, and denouncing the whole community, but the book leaves the impression that the people well deserve all that Amos says to them or about them. This little story about Amaziah is the only place in the book where anyone "answers back," and even here it is Amos who dominates the situation; so that, at first, there seems to be no question but that *either* Amos is all right, and Amaziah is all wrong, *or* Amaziah is all right, and Amos is all wrong.

It may be granted at once that to Amos and Amaziah themselves such a choice was necessary. Each one felt himself to be in the right and the other in the wrong. But we stand far enough away from them to see that life as a whole is larger than their views of it, and that we need both types of leaders. In order that the principles proclaimed by Amos should become the practical basis of daily life, it would be quite as natural as it was necessary that they should produce some kind of an organization devoted to their application. Men have to work in groups this way. As soon as that is recognized, it is clear that there must be such men as Amaziah who will represent the organization and its purposes. There must be, so to speak, a chairman of the meeting.

In other words, Amos and Amaziah stand for two aspects of life which are equally essential yet which seem at times to be in violent contradiction with each other—namely, inspiration and organization, one speaking through the individual, and the other through the group, one supplying principle and motive, and the other supplying form and method. In the larger field of human life as a whole we cannot say *either* Amos *or* Amaziah; we must include *both* Amos *and* Amaziah. There must be such men as Amos—men who are inspired and who inspire. These men must awaken our consciences by giving us new standards of life and action. They must humiliate us by pointing out how far short we come of the glory of God. They must blaze the trail for further progress along the

ascending and unending path of righteousness, the upward calling of God in Christ Jesus.

There must also be such men as Amaziah—men who can teach and administer. These men must show us how to organize for practical use the spiritual gains brought us by the others. These men must preserve spiritual values through the long centuries that lack outstanding prophets. They must teach succeeding generations the way of life as far as that way has been made known.

These facts have an important bearing on our thought of the church. The church is obviously a great organization, preserving the religious inheritance of the past, teaching successive generations, consoling, correcting, leading men from age to age. Yet to do its highest work it must be saved from the drying-up process that seems to be the fate of all organizations. It must be prevented from turning its attention inward upon its own affairs as if it were an end in itself. It must not only keep old ideals fresh and vital, but must be expectant and receptive of new ones. This spirit of life, this eager vitality, is awakened and revived by seers and prophets. They are the ones to shake us out of indolence, to open blind eyes and to unstop deaf ears. Until they appear, we do not realize how mechanical and formal we have become, nor how much farther we have to go.

The prophet is necessary if there is to be any religious progress, while the church is necessary if the prophetic ideals are to be preserved, administered, and made practical for the rank and file. Prophets themselves make poor church members, while churches seem too slow and ponderous to satisfy the prophets. Yet the church gives the prophet his background and his inspiration, while the prophet gives the church its visions and its vitality. *Not either—or but both—and* should represent our attitude toward Amos and Amaziah, toward prophet and church. Without the prophetic spirit the church is lifeless, and without the churchly means and methods the prophet is helpless. The ideal is that the organization should be directed and administered in a way to make practical and effective the high aims and far visions of the prophets.

## QUESTIONS TO DISCUSS

Is there anything in the book of Amos that prevents us from regarding it as having been written by someone who collected his sayings rather than by Amos himself?

Is there any good reason why a few words of other teachers than Amos should not have been included?

To what degree has a man a right to criticize and to denounce institutions that represent a nation's religious and political life?

Is the fact that a man's words tend to disturb the peace a sign that he speaks for God? Is it a sign that he doesn't?

Is there any way by which, if such a man should speak to-day, we could be sure that he was or was not speaking for God?

Could we have been sure about Amos if we had lived then?

Can service be unselfish if it be paid for in money? Where can we draw the line? How about ministers? or Sunday-school teachers?

## CHAPTER XIII

### NOTES THAT INTERPRET AMOS

#### THE NOTE OF REALITY

ONE of the reasons why many earnest Christians do not get more out of their reading and study of the Bible is because it seems so unreal and far away. Its formal language, its unfamiliar names, its strange customs, its foreign and ancient background, and, above all, its hallowed associations all tend to remove it from any contact with life as we know it and live it. The people referred to in the Bible are regarded as being "in the Bible" rather than in the earth. They are "Bible characters" rather than "human characters." The Hebrew nation, so far as its story appears in the Bible, is thought of as having lived, moved, and had its being in an atmosphere of "religion," occupying a world all its own—a world that had little or nothing in common with the ancient world we study about in school.

While it is true that these ideas are not always stated in just these words, years of observation confirm the opinion that for most readers the Bible has all the unreality here indicated. This does not mean that the readers are not religious or sincere. Most of them are undoubtedly earnest and devout, and many of them are living lives that are beautiful examples of the Christian spirit. Neither does it mean that this feeling of distance and unreality prevents a man from "getting good out of the Bible." Innumerable passages spring immediately to mind as words that, beyond all others and beyond all question, are "profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness."

The sayings of the Bible, enriched by centuries of sacred associations, justify all that has been affirmed of their power and beauty, but they do not stand alone. Back of

them are the men who first spoke them and who lived them before they were spoken. David lived and loved before the Psalms were written; Isaiah prayed and taught before there could be a book of Isaiah; Peter and Paul and the rest were telling the gospel story and living Christian lives before there was any New Testament. The Spirit of God in the heart of man produced the Scriptures. That is, God came into the Scriptures by way of man; he did not come to man by way of the Scriptures.

This means that the task of the Bible student is not to make the Scriptures real but to discover the reality already there. Amos, Amaziah, and Jeroboam were real people, leading busy lives according to their place and calling. The lesson they have for us cannot be found *from their words alone*. The character and principles that lie back of the words must show us what the words mean; for the same words spoken by different persons may have quite different meanings. There could be no more striking illustration of this than the way the words of Jesus are felt to derive their chief value from his character and spirit. It was because he *lived* his gospel that the gospel words speak with divine power. When this reality has once been discerned, the Bible becomes a new book. Its pages glow with a new light and its words speak with a new spirit. Its figures come to life and call to us across the centuries:

"Seek ye the LORD while he may be found;  
Call ye upon him while he is near" (Isa. 55. 6).

For out of lives as earnest and as perplexing as our own they sought the Lord. Out of tribulation and distress, out of doubts and fears, they called upon him. Their search is ours. And despite the immeasurable advantage and illumination that have come to us since their day the end is not yet.

#### THE NOTE OF PROGRESS

As soon as the note of reality has been struck, its sound carries far beyond a single event or individual. As Amos is recognized in terms of real life he loses his isolation and is seen as one of many men who in their own way wrought

and taught the will of God so far as it had been revealed to their time.

In the study of a prophet like Amos at least two steps are involved. The first step is to examine his book and anything else about him that can be found in order to discover the man himself and just what he stood for. No matter how severe his words nor how extreme some of his ideas, the task is not to criticize but to construct. He must be permitted to stand on his own feet, to see things with his own eyes, and to speak his message in his own words.

This kind of study neither denies nor obscures the work of the Spirit of God. It is not until such study is performed that the divine process can be recognized and appreciated. The prophets were men quite out of the ordinary in their sensitiveness to the divine Spirit and in the intensity with which they gave themselves to the proclamation of the divine will. But this very sensitiveness and intensity mark them out as men whose messages must be carefully distinguished from their personalities. Only as their personal traits and points of view become clear can we escape the danger of accepting as the word of God some word of the prophet which springs from individuality rather than from inspiration.

The second step is to give the prophet his place in the great stream of progressive revelation which flows through the Bible. Moses, Samuel, Nathan, Elijah, and many other prophets had arisen before the time of Amos, each one in his own day speaking the word of the Lord as the Lord made it known. After Amos were to come Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and many others, differing among themselves as "one star differeth from another star in glory." When given his proper place among these other prophets the teachings of Amos fall into a true perspective. It can then be seen where he advanced beyond his predecessors, where he fell below those who followed, and where his words had purely local and temporary significance. Unless this second step is taken, it is easy to be misled as to the ultimate value or importance of any word of any prophet, including Amos.

The revelation that comes in the life and words of any one of the Old Testament characters is not a complete or final revelation. It was not complete for any one type of teacher, because priest and prophet, sage and psalmist, differed from each other quite as widely then as such men would differ to-day, representing as they do such different aims and points of view. Even less was it complete for any one time, because successive priests, prophets, and sages were continually striking out new paths, enlarging upon the work of their predecessors, at times correcting it, and even on occasion superseding it entirely. In a word, revelation was progressive, "shining more and more unto the perfect day."

#### THE NOTE OF CHRIST

If it had not been for Jesus, probably few outside the Jewish race would ever have heard of the Jewish Scriptures. The collection of writings which we call the Old Testament, and which the Jews call the Scriptures, was brought over into Christianity by the first followers of Jesus; and until the new faith produced writings of its own, these were the only Scriptures the Christians had. Even after numerous Christian writings had appeared, it was some time before they were held in as high esteem as the writings received from the Jews. As a matter of fact, these were never displaced. And when, as the years passed, the Christian writings were finally accepted as the equal of the Jewish Scriptures in sanctity and authority, the two collections were joined together, the former being called the Old Testament, and the latter the New.

Once the Christians had produced a literature of their own, they would not have needed the Jewish writings any further, unless these had some vital relation to the new faith. It was realized not only that Christ was to be found in the Old Testament, but that the Old Testament was preparatory for the New; so that from the days of the first followers of Jesus the Jewish Scriptures have formed part of the Christian Bible.

At first the references to Christ were found almost exclusively in symbols and types or in prophetic predictions



that were regarded as anticipating his historic appearance; and in some parts of the Old Testament these were not difficult to find. But these are not the only anticipations of Christ which the Old Testament affords, and more recent study has recognized that the whole Old Testament, in all its narratives, sermons, psalms, and proverbs, is the record of an agelong approach to God as revealed in Jesus Christ. Throughout the long devious history of Hebrew religious thought the valleys were being exalted, the mountains and hills made low, the crooked made straight, and the rough places plain, that the glory of the Lord might be revealed.

Under the guidance and inspiration of their religious teachers the Hebrew people were slowly being led to deeper ideas of sin and righteousness, more spiritual ideas of God, more ethical ideas of man's relation to his fellows, and purer ideas of love and hope. Without this kind of preparation in the life and thought of the people special predictions and symbolic interpretations would have accomplished little in the way of real preparation.

True, the people as a whole did not keep pace with their prophets; but those who did, few though they were, formed a leaven whose influence was not confined to their own immediate circle, and it was they who made possible the little group that welcomed Jesus when he came. It may well be doubted whether any of the apostles would have been ready to receive and to preserve the Golden Rule if Amos and those who followed him had not taught justice to the poor and kindness toward the weak. As a matter of fact it was when the prophets were most active among their own people that they were doing their most fruitful work as heralds of the One who was to come. They addressed themselves to whatever situation the people were in at the time. They set forth new standards of human action, they rebuked the people for not meeting these standards, they warned them of the punishments that would follow disobedience. In this way they were breaking up fallow ground and sowing the seed of a purer and truer religion. In a spiritual sense the Christian religion is the harvest of that sowing.

Jesus is thus both the fulfillment and the interpretation of these preparations. Until he came, the searching words of the prophets, their appeals, their warnings, their hopes, were scattered here and there along the path of Hebrew history. They had little inner connection and they gave no indication of forming parts of any large clear design.

The messengers reflect the isolation of the messages. The prophets were well aware of the inner urging of the divine Spirit. Their feet were set on the heavenward road. They had unflinching trust in God, and nothing could shake their confidence in the righteousness of his cause and its ultimate victory. But it was a *direction* they were sure of, not a goal.

Then, in the fullness of time, Jesus came, and all the scattered lights that had shone here and there through the years were drawn together to a focus. All the graces and virtues, the hopes and high aims, that had inspired and ennobled the Hebrew race previous to that time now fell into place, as men caught a glimpse of "the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ." Immediately those prophetic messages took on new meaning. They were recognized as partial expressions of the spirit that was in Jesus, and as such it was realized that they were true foregleams of the true Light.

This kind of a fulfillment of the prophecies includes them all. It does not seek here and there a word or a figure that may be applied to Christ. It goes at once to the heart of the matter: man's faith and man's duty. It concerns the very spirit of the great work to which Christ gave himself—that of leading men to love God with all their hearts and their neighbors as themselves.

The more clearly this purpose of Christ is understood, the easier it is to see the true nature of the prophetic work and the vital importance of the prophets themselves. It is possible to recognize an underlying harmony of purpose which relates the prophets closely to one another despite the numerous differences and occasional contradictions. They differed greatly among themselves in personal characteristics and they were called to meet very different situations; so that they necessarily differed in manner and

message, "but all these worketh that one and the self-same Spirit, dividing to each one severally as he will."

It is in this "goodly fellowship of the prophets" that Amos belongs. The fervor of his utterance and the frequent harshness of his words have made him seem, at times, almost forbidding. Yet these cannot obscure his heartfelt burden for his people and the spiritual perplexities that this occasioned in his own soul. If he stood alone, as the only prophet, we might have a most unfavorable impression of prophecy. But when he is recognized as one who had to break new ground in the field of religion and as only one of the earliest in a long line of inspired teachers, his uncompromising rigor can be understood and forgiven, and his enduring contribution to religious thought properly appreciated.

And even though he has no word which taken by itself points directly and individually to Jesus, there moves through all his message that new sense of justice, of the value of man as man, and of the deceitfulness of riches, which links him immediately with the Great Teacher. Christ thus interprets and fulfills the message of Amos; and in the light of this interpretation and fulfillment Amos stands forth, clearly outlined against the dim background of a distant past, as one whose glory it was, according to his light and his opportunity, truly to prepare the way for the Christ, the Saviour of the world. And man can have no higher glory.

#### REVIEW

Gather up what has been learned on the following subjects and any others that may suggest themselves:

What constitutes true worship?

How can men best serve God?

The dangers of wealth and luxury.

The rights of the poor.

The importance of civil and social justice.

The power and limitations of prayer.

The relation of the prophets to the coming of Christ.





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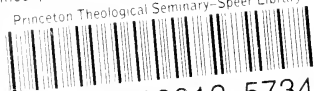
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